MARXIST VIEWS ON INDIA IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

BASTIAAN WIELENGA

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Note on the Author

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MARXIST VIEWS ON INDIA IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

BY

BASTIAAN WIELENGA

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PREFACE

The first publication in the *Studies on Indian Marxism* series was the autobiography of Fr. Vadakkan with the title '*A Priest's Encounter with Revolution.*' It sees the forces at work in Kerala society and politics in a crucial period of Indian history seen through the eyes of one person who was deeply involved.

This second publication by Dr. Bas Wielenga is the result of a scholar's research into the manner in which Marx and Marxists use Marxism as a tool of understanding certain specific realities of Asian societies in general and of Indian society in particular. As one who has done his doctorate from Berlin on the thought of Lenin, Dr. Wielenga is well qualified and equipped to do it. He began this study when he was associated with the CISRS staff for two years. The results of his research with some of his reflections are not only a contribution to the history of Marxist thought, they also evaluate Indian Marxism and show the path forward in grappling with realities of Indian life, which traditional Marxist categories have ignored or inadequately understood. Especially the role of the peasants and of Gandhi.

The CISRS is grateful to Jean Paranjoti-Augustine for editing the manuscript and seeing the book through the Press.

Tiruvalla,
1 Dec. 1976.

M. M. THOMAS
Officiating Director-CISRS.

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INTRODUCTION

This essay was written as part of the CISRS study programme on Indian Marxism which tries to scrutinize how Indian Marxists relate to Indian reality as a whole and to the specific features that distinguish India from other countries and continents. At present the international Communist movement offers a broad spectrum of Marxist variations, deviations or transformations, ranging from Moscow to Peking and from Trotskyites to Guevarists—a phenomenon which is quite familiar and understandable to Christians when they look at their own history. The whole range, more or less, is represented on the Indian scene. The Moscow line is followed by the CPI; Maoist doctrines are propagated by several underground groups; some of the so-called Naxalite policies could better be characterized as Guevarist; and the Trotskyites apart from being organised in a small party (RSP) seem to gain influence in academic circles. The CPI (M) though opposed to the CPI and critical of several aspects of the Soviet line is closer to Moscow than to Peking and can be identified with earlier positions taken by Moscow. This identification of the Indian leftist parties with positions in the international Communist movement does not necessarily imply that the policies of these parties are imposed or projected from outside. The differences among them reflect dilemmas and ambiguities within the Indian situation, different possibilities of reading and tackling the situation. But it can be said that the inner-Marxist debate has been concentrated on questions of class-analysis, and of political strategy and tactics which could be discussed in terms which were valid throughout the Communist movement all over the world.

Thus the debate focussed on such problems as the character of state power, the role of the bourgeoisie in the struggle for independence and thereafter, on the advantages and disadvantages of United Front politics from below or from above, on the classes which could be included in United Front alliances, and on the proper and effective means of struggle, be it participation in the parliamentary system or people's war.

Other aspects of the Indian situation, particularly the role of cultural traditions, received less attention. This may have been due partly to the fact that the debate was held previously in the international context of the Comintern which naturally worked with a generally applicable set of analytical tools and categories.

National peculiarities in terms of economic and political conditions could be taken into consideration with the help of the categories of Marxist class-analysis and political strategy. But specific cultural and historical factors like that of caste did not so easily fit in and therefore tended to remain neglected or at least unanalysed on their own terms. An undialectical understanding of Marx's image of society as consisting of the economic base and a political and cultural superstructure furthered such reduction of unfamiliar phenomena to the well-known realities of political economy. The ideological confrontation with bourgeois nationalism which tried to utilize the great heritage of the past for the national liberation struggle supported the tendency of neglecting certain other cultural factors. The Indian Communists were not so much in need of a re-affirmation of the national identity, and tended to under-estimate its importance—in contrast with the Chinese and Vietnamese Communists who led the national struggle. The former got their identity and their motivation as it were from the future for which the proletariat all over the world was fighting. Looking back to

the past for an unique Indian heritage was unnecessary and even harmful.

Culturally there is an inbuilt tension between orthodox Marxism and Asian nationalism not only because of Marxist internationalism but also because of the urban-metropolitan orientation of Marxism. In its perspective villages and peasants are representatives of the past. Agrarian societies are not only economically but also culturally backward in comparison with the industrial advanced countries. The future society is going to be industrialized and urbanized. The industrial workers are the decisive subjects of the revolution and of the new society in which the human potential will be fully developed. Put into a unilinear scheme of historical progress this view condemns the agrarian countries and the majority of their population to a secondary role. The Soviet Union claims on this base a leading role over the less developed countries under Communist rule. The Chinese Communists disputed this claim on two levels. They proclaimed the rural areas of the world to be the base from where the world revolution would march forward to conquer, finally the metropolitan areas. According to this understanding those who were supposed to be the first are turning out to be the last in the revolutionary process. Secondly, while acknowledging the backwardness and underdevelopment of China in terms of industrialization and levels of technology, they denied that this would be an obstacle in constructing Socialism. In orthodox Marxism, Socialism and Communism are conceivable only after a high level of industrialization and modernization is reached. With the formation of people's communes in the Great Leap Forward the Chinese Communists claimed to have moved forward to Socialism prior to the fulfilling of these material conditions. The Socialist structure of society and mass-mobilization are

seen as the conditions for the modernization of society; huge rural masses are no longer seen and treated as a liability on the way to Socialism. Technical backwardness is no reason for inferiority complexes and development does not mean the imitation of those who claim to be more developed. This opens new perspectives for socialist construction under Asian conditions without excessive dependence on examples set and aid given by the Soviet Union and other developed Socialist countries.

Meanwhile in its turn, China claims universal validity for its particular experience and experiment. It supposes that there are no basic differences between pre-revolutionary China and other Asian and African countries. The Indian Maoists have acted upon this assumption and failed. Maoism had come to mean—against the spirit of Mao himself—blind imitation and mechanical application of the Chinese way. Independent Indian Marxists have convincingly shown the crucial differences between pre-revolutionary China and India which makes it meaningless to follow the same revolutionary strategy.

So far the differences in the cultural traditions of China and India have not been taken into account. What, for instance, is the impact of the fact that the Chinese tradition centres upon man's role in history and society, whereas the Indian tradition is much more interested in the metaphysical questions of ultimate reality? This question cannot be pursued here but it may show why interest in the cultural tradition could be of relevance to the revolutionary perspective. In general, the cultural question acquired a different function in India because here it is not related so much to the cause of re-capturing and re-assuring national identity, as to the analysis of impediments to radical change and to the pattern and shape of the future society.

This study can contribute only indirectly to the discussion of such questions. It takes up one particular topic of inner-Marxist discussion all over the world which has served to clarify the Marxist approach to societies which in their historical development do not fit into the long cherished popular Marxist scheme of historical development through the stages of slavery, feudalism and Capitalism, or which otherwise need to be analysed on their own terms. The debate originated with Marx's concept of 'Asiatic mode of production' which was suppressed under Stalin's rule. Meanwhile the limitations of this concept have become very clear. It is one of the results of the debate that Marxist scholars have taken a fresh and flexible approach to the question of the general framework in which they analyse particular historical phases and phenomena. This implies that the debate itself can be decided only on the basis of concrete historical studies of particular societies. For this the author is not competent. But a review of the debate itself and of its repercussions may still be of some use.

There is a wide-spread belief among liberals and even progressive radicals including many Christians that Marxism—apart from its ideological and political relevance as the ideology of the Socialist countries and Communist parties—is an obsolete theory from 19th century Europe which no enlightened contemporary of the latter half of the 20th century needs to take seriously as a method of analysis of his own situation. This judgement is especially popular in the USA but it is not limited to that country which has not yet seriously been challenged by a strong Marxist movement within its own borders. The same assumption dominates academic Sociology as well as Christian social action. And this is certainly detrimental to both. The present author is convinced that the Marxist focus on class-contradictions as the core of social

and political ideological reality is indispensable for a realistic understanding of society. Moreover, he shares as a Christian the Marxist conviction that this theoretical approach has to be part of a practical partiality in favour of the exploited and oppressed classes. This offends, of course, the academic dogma—and illusion—of neutrality, but it accords with the biblical insight that finding the truth is a matter of walking a path and making a choice. I believe that following Jesus Christ as the living truth implies the choice to see the reality of society from the bottom and to support the struggle for emancipation from the bottom. The aim is human emancipation for all which is true for Marxists also. But this aim cannot be served by an illusionary neutrality in the class struggle which always amounts to support for the ruling class, and less so by benevolent liberalism from above.

I am aware of the fact that it poses problems to many Marxists when Christians or others—but I limit myself in the following to the matter of Christians—who are supposed to be 'outsiders' start claiming adherence to Marxist principles. After so many negative experiences they have good reason to be suspicious about the reliability of such comrades when it comes to the revolutionary test or even prior to that. They may base this scepticism primarily on the fact that Christians necessarily, as long as they remain Christians, do not relate exclusively to Marxism only and follow an eclectic approach with regard to orthodox Marxism as a comprehensive world-view including atheism. They may share much of the Marxist critique of religion but in whatever way they relate to the God of the Bible and to Jesus of Nazareth it is beyond the scope of traditional Marxism. They can be Communists in the sense of sharing the aims of Communist society and of participating in the struggle for it, but they cannot be Marxists in the sense of accepting all what is

said to be an integral part of Marxism-Leninism excluding anything else.[1]

Christians can accept Marxist analysis of society, but their loyalty to Jesus Christ cannot be subordinated to a closed world-view nor in an ultimate sense to any party-discipline for that matter. The latter does not mean that Christians must be anarchistic individualists because of their loyalty to Christ. If they decide to join the struggle of the oppressed classes because of this loyalty they certainly also have to accept the discipline which such a struggle requires. But as long as Marxist parties make a total claim it is honest to say that to that extent and in that sense Christians cannot be relied upon.

Yet, I do not believe that this reservation poses a basic problem with regard to Communism as a movement and Marxism as a theory but only regarding Marxism as it became institutionalized under certain conditions. The tension between institutional discipline and personal conscience is both an internal Marxist and an internal Christian problem. The Marxist-Christian dialogue may have highlighted it but it did not create it and it is far from being limited to the field of Marxist-Christian interaction. Both the institutional churches and the institutional parties react nervously to the heretic interaction between some Marxists and Christians, in theoretical and practical affairs. Excommunication is one of the means on both sides to restore law and order in this respect. But Marxism and Christianity have their impact far beyond the walls and cells of their institutions. Synods cannot stop Marxists from reading the Bible in a critical and

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[1] For a more elaborate discussion of this position see the article of Gabriele Dietrich and the author ' Can a Christian be a Communist ?', published in *Marxist Review* of July 1975.

creative way and Party Congresses cannot stop Christians from applying Marxist methods of analysis. In recent times Marxism went through a renaissance in which its critical power got re-vitalized. A new listening to Marx himself has opened alternatives to dogmatic Marxism which enabled Christians among others to share a Marxist outlook. Scepticism regarding the reliability of Christians as comrades in practice is not so much an affair of their theoretical deficiencies in my opinion but much more of their practical shortcomings in standing the test of political confrontation. The church has a long tradition of domesticating and compromising in spite of its militant message of emancipation and radical renewal. Middle-class Christians especially, besides being prey to the usual middle-class hang-ups, may fall back if it comes to the test because of deep-rooted, subconscious inhibitions to face the struggle. Practice will have to prove whether Christian leftists can develop the same stamina in changing society which other Christians show in defending the *status quo*.

So far as theory goes Christian Communists are in a difficult dilemma. As 'outsiders' we have no right to take issue with inner-Marxist debates. As ' insiders ' who have started to think in a Marxist way we cannot avoid it. The result is that we come out on the side of critical Marxists which may compromise them in the eyes of the dogmatists. This is also the problem with the following study. Surveying the debate on Asiatic mode of production a critical analysis of the stifling role of Stalinist dogmatism cannot and should not be avoided. Since the latter—in an indirect and not much reflected way—has dominated popular Indian Marxism to a large extent many sincere Marxists who are no Stalinists in any practical, real sense could feel offended. Still, my only intention is to strengthen the critical, creative power of Marxist theory by analysing some of its weaknesses in the past and by stressing

the importance of returning to Marx for that purpose. Going back to the sources is the most direct way ahead to break through what has become an obstacle to creative theory and practice. This is true for Marxism as well as for Christianity. The biblical texts are the most explosive material underneath the dogmatism and bureaucratism of the churches. That is why the medieval church preferred not to give the Bible to its lay people. Party bureaucrats may also prefer some catechism to the original texts of Marx. Fortunately an English edition of the works of Marx and Engels is now being published from Moscow. It will give the English reading public more access to Marx's writings, which may broaden the way for creative Marxist thinking.

I apologize for pursuing the analogy of Marxism and Christianity still further though I know that they are incomparable in basic respects. Marxism is no religion and the Christian faith is no scientific method of analysis and this is precisely the reason why they do not exclude each other. However, both require commitment and both have similar experiences in the process of doctrine-building and institutionalization. As in Christianity, there is in Marxism a permanent tension between the universal and the particular. Christianity arrived at the claim of universal truth starting from the particular history of Israel and focusing on Jesus Christ, the incarnate word of God, living in a particular place and time. Confessing him as the revelation of universal truth, the later church could reverse the approach and start from the proclamation of universal principles—borrowed from Greek philosophy—and find them illustrated and affirmed in the particular revelation of Jesus Christ. Marxism as a scientific theory developed in the analysis of a particular form of society, i.e. Capitalist society as it was found in Britain at that time. In the course of this analysis Marx was able to formulate laws which hold true for

Capitalism in general and in contrasting Capitalist society with pre-Capitalist societies he also arrived at conclusions regarding the development of human history as a whole. In the same manner he got some general insights regarding human nature and its development by analysing man-in-his-alienation-in-Capitalist-society. By its particular nature Capitalism allowed insights into the nature of man and history which were not possible before. Later Marxists could also reverse the process and make the final conclusions the starting point. In this process the findings regarding Capitalist society may get the function of illustrating some general principles. This happened in the doctrinal system of dialectical and historical materialism as codified by Stalin. Though the analogy has many dissimilarities one could say that there is a similar relation between the historical and political-economic writings of Marx and Stalin's doctrinal system as between the biblical texts and some scholastic system of church doctrine. Both developments are connected with the process of institutionalization and exercising power. Marx in his time was not connected in any continuous manner with party-organisation as it was the case with Kautsky, Lenin, Stalin and so on. The same difference exists between Jesus and the prophets and bishops and other sorts of church administrators. Institutions demand catechisms, it seems. To a certain extent such developments are unavoidable. The point is to counterbalance them by keeping open the first way along with the second way, to have the prophetic to keep the doctrinal in check, to have a real dialectic of theory and reality which is possible only through a real dialectic of theory and practice. This has bearing on the problems of Marxist analysis of Indian society.

Marxism came to India in its generalized catechism form of Marxism-Leninism. Naturally, the first thing was to test

its universal truth in the application to the particular society of India. And, of course, there is no reason to criticize any analysis which traces *f.i.* the development of Capitalism in India. It is definitely necessary to do it and Marxist theory is particularly well equipped to do it. Problems arise only if the counter-check is neglected, that is to say if in its turn Indian reality in its complex particularity is not made the starting point of the scrutiny and if those features are not going to be considered as well which are not accounted for by the general laws and principles. Take the example of caste. It is one thing to trace its origin and to analyse its function in terms of class and division of labour. This certainly brings out decisive aspects which may be neglected by those who approach it from the religious or psychological angle. It is quite another thing to leave it at the conclusion that caste is nothing different at all. That would make Marxist practice blind to the unfamiliar, in this case to a crucial aspect of Indian reality. It would in addition hinder Marxist theory to enrich itself by developing creatively its analytical set of instruments in order to cope with the whole complex reality of caste in the context of Indian society and its history. Unfortunately, the author is not able to elaborate on this particular and crucial example in the pages that follow, but it illustrates the intention of this paper regarding the methodology of Marxist analysis.

The first part of this study gives a survey of the history of the discussion on the Asiatic mode of production and its implications outside India in relation with the development of Marxist doctrine as a whole. The second part tries to trace the pattern of discussion in India. It has great limitations because of the author's lack of competence in the historical field. It is not based on a complete survey either. It is hoped, nevertheless, that some basic trends have been eluci-

dated which give some insight into the whole development of Marxism in India. The third part begins with a tentative evaluation of the ways in which Indian Marxists related to Mahatma Gandhi who, as it were, embodied the cultural ambiguities and political dilemmas which Communists had to face in India. This leads to some final reflections regarding the relevance of the Asiatic mode of production debate for the Communist movement in India: How does it relate to the village—and the peasantry at large—and to the State bureaucracy?

I am deeply grateful to Dr. M. M. Thomas and Sri Ajit Roy of Calcutta who both, each from his own perspective, has given me basic orientation, helpful criticism, and inspiration for future work.

CHAPTER I

MARX ON INDIA

1. India and China—from a European Perspective

As a London-based correspondent of the *New York Daily Tribune* Karl Marx wrote numerous articles on Asian affairs during the fifties of the 19th century, which give a first impression of his way of looking towards Asia. The relevant material is contained in a series of articles on India written in 1853 in connection with a parliamentary debate on the East India Company, further in a series written in 1857-8 in connection with the Great Mutiny, and in several articles on China written during the fifties mostly on the occasion of the Anglo-Chinese conflicts, the Tai-ping revolution, and commercial developments.[1]

It cannot be overlooked that Marx is looking towards India and China from a European perspective, more precisely from the perspective of the coming revolution in Europe. He found one of the reasons for the collapse of the revolution in 1848 in the worldwide expansion of Capitalism which gave bourgeois rule in Europe some respite. Now he is looking for signs that this expansion is reaching its limits. As he expects the ripening of the conditions for the overcoming of Capitalism in the most advanced countries of Europe, especially Britain, he reckons with the flows of trade, the limitations for growing exports of British industry to countries like India and China, and the big power-game between Russia and Britain in Asia as factors that could influence to a large extent

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[1] Quotations from : K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Colonialism*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, or from additional material in : *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*, Ed. by Shlomo Avineri, Anchor Books, New York, 1969.

the pace of revolution in Europe. Thus Marx writes in an article called 'Revolution in China and in Europe' (1853) :

> It may seem a very strange, and a very paradoxical assertion that the next uprising of the people of Europe, and their next movement for republican freedom and economy of government, may depend more probably on what is now passing in the Celestial Empire,—the very opposite of Europe,—than on any other political cause that now exists.[2]

The reasoning for this is that the Tai-ping revolution Marx is referring to may lead to a decrease in British exports to China, and to a rise of prices of its imports from China, which along with other economic difficulties may cause a general commercial and industrial crisis.

> Under these circumstances, as the greater part of the regular commercial circle has already been run through by British trade, it may safely be augured that the Chinese revolution will throw the spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis, which, spreading abroad, will be closely followed by political revolutions on the Continent.[3]

Similarly Marx was primarily interested in the impact of the Mutiny of 1857-8 on politics and economics in Britain :

> With the drain of men and bullion which it must cost the English, India is now our best ally.[4]

These and other scattered remarks and reflections about the impact of developments in Asia on the revolutionary perspectives in Europe contain some basic elements of the theories of imperialism which were formulated in the next century. They build upon the assumption that world-wide expanding

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[2] *On Colonialism*, p. 15.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[4] To Engels, 14th January 1858 ; in *On Colonialism*, p. 317.

European Capitalism becomes vulnerable everywhere, so that all sorts of convulsions, rebellions and national revolutions in the colonized countries could contribute to the cause of socialist revolution in Europe. A crucial text for this concept in Marx's own writings can be found in a letter to Engels on Ireland, the 'first English colony' as Engels called it, which showed 'that the so-called liberty of English citizens is based on the oppression of the colonies'.[5]

Marx wrote :

> For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working-class ascendancy. Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working-class will never accomplish anything until it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland.[6]

This text played an important role in later discussions on the role of colonies in revolutionary strategy. As a political strategist Marx had a world-outlook no doubt, he included political and economic developments all over the world in his calculations and revolutionary expectations. But obviously—and understandable in the context of his time—this outlook is dominated by a Europe centred concept of the emancipation of mankind through a Socialist revolution.

Marx did not yet examine in depth the social forces at work in Chinese or Indian society while dealing with the Great Mutiny or the Tai-ping revolution as he used to do while writing on European revolutions. In fact, he does not regard these upheavals in Asia as anything comparable with European revolutions. After saying that in the absence of Europeans 'there is nobody there against whom they could

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[5] To Marx, 23rd May 1856, *ibid.*, p. 314.

[6] To Engels, 10-2-1869, in *ibid.*, p. 329.

rise ' he calls it ' a curious *quid pro quo* to expect an Indian revolt to assume the features of a European revolution '.[7]

And with regard to the Chinese revolutionaries, to whom he ascribed at an earlier date that they were fighting a ' popular war for the maintenance of Chinese nationality '[8], he wrote in 1862 :

> They are not conscious of any task, except the change of dynasty. They have no slogans. They are an even greater scourge to the population than the old rulers. It seems that their vocation is nothing else than to set against the conservative disintegration (of China), its destruction, in grotesque horrifying form, without any seeds for a renaissance.'[9]

Marx finds the causes for this assumed lack of revolutionary vocation and determination in the character of Chinese society, which is ' a fossil form of social life ', stagnant, incapable of change. He finds the same in India. That is why the only real revolutions taking place in Asia are brought about by European intrusion. Whatever is changing in India or China, it is originally caused not by any inner dynamics of their own society, but by the impact of European trade, war, and colonial rule. The Mutiny started in the army created by the British, being ' the first general centre of resistance which the Indian people was ever possessed of '.[10] The Chinese revolution is a consequence of English trade, opium and canons breaking up the isolation of the Old Empire, and destroying the balance of its traditional economy.[11]

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[7] 18-8-1857 ; Avineri, *ibid.*, p. 214.
[8] 1857, in *On Colonialism*, p. 128.
[9] *Avineri, ibid.*, p. 441.
[10] 1857 ; in *On Colonialism*, p. 131.
[11] *Cf.* the article ' Revolution in China and in Europe ', in *On Colo-lism*, pp. 15ff.

Why did Marx not expect any progress to come forth out of the Asian society itself, brought about by the dynamic of its own contradictions, following the same pattern of historical development as European society from ancient society through Feudalism to Capitalism? Already in these journalistic articles Marx tries to answer this question by analysing Asiatic society as a peculiar form of society which differs from any of the past formations in European history.[12] What strikes Marx in Asiatic society is its stagnancy, its unchangeableness. The explanation for this he finds in the combination of three features which characterize traditional Asiatic society. The first is the absence of private property of land, which was such a powerful force of change in other parts of the world, where it helped to dissolve primitive formations of society. The second feature is the indispensable role of centralised State power—Marx speaks of 'Oriental despotism', an expression used in Europe since the 17th century—for the provision of public works, especially in the field of large-scale irrigation. He ascribes it to the low level of civilization and to the vast territory that made it impossible for voluntary associations to fulfil this task as it happened in the Occident. The third and most important characteristic is the village system, based on common ownership of land, and on the union of agriculture and manufacture which makes each village self-sufficient, and therefore capable of surviving empires, but which at the same time makes it the unchangeable basis of permanent stagnation.

Seventy years earlier than Gandhi, Marx recognized that the handloom and the spinning-wheel were the pivots of the structure of Indian society from immemorial times, and that British steam, science and free trade were responsible for the

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[12] See especially the series of articles on India in 1853, beginning with 'The British rule in India', *On Colonialism*, p. 32ff.

destruction of that society. Whereas Gandhi concludes that only a return to this system can liberate India from the English yoke, Marx welcomes and justifies the destruction of this system in spite of the suffering it causes as a necessary step on the way of human progress and emancipation.

> Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other part, in contra-distinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutal worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow.[13]

Marx leaves no doubt about the terror of European colo-

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

nialism, its atrocities and its brutal exploitation which he condemns from a moral point of view. With all the means of biting sarcasm he expresses his indignation, in exposing the hypocrisy of the Christian, civilized British bourgeoisie, which makes fortunes with the trade of opium, breaks treaties for the sake of profits, uses torture to extract taxes, and slaughters people to suppress a rebellion. He describes the conquest of the East Indian Empire as the business of 'scientific barbarians', undertaken not 'for the purposes of civilization', but for the sake of 'plunder by means of murder'.[14] or :

> The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked.[15]

Nevertheless, in spite of this moral verdict, Marx accepts and welcomes the European intrusion and impact on Asia as a progressive step in the history of mankind. Referring to the level of social, economic and political organisation and using the vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxon ethnology of his days, he speaks in positive terms about the impact of (Western) civilization upon barbarian, uncivilized Asian society. This is based on his conviction that only the realization of universal intercourse of mankind, brought about by the creation of a world market, can lay the foundation of the new society he is looking for. In this perspective Capitalism and bourgeoisie have an indispensable task :

> The bourgeois period of history has to create the material basis of the new world—on the one hand the universal intercourse founded upon the mutual dependency of mankind, and the means of that intercourse; on the other

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[14] *On Colonialism*.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 88; *cf.* f.i. also the article on British atrocities in India, 1858, Avineri, pp. 280-4; and the articles dealing with the Opium Trade.

> hand the development of the productive powers of man and the transformation of material production into a scientific domination of natural agencies. Bourgeois industry and commerce create these material conditions of a new world in the same way as geological revolutions have created the surface of the earth.[16]

Marx speaks about a ' double Mission ' of England in India: ' one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of western society in Asia '.[17]

The first task consists mainly of the destruction of the economic basis of the village communities. By doing this the British ' produced the greatest, and, to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia.'[18]

He adds :—

> England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia ? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.[19]

The second task of regenerating was yet to be fulfilled, but its beginnings could be seen in the build-up of a native army, the ' *sine qua non* of Indian self-emancipation ', the introduction of a free press, for the first time in Asiatic society, the establishing of private property in land, ' the great desideratum of Asiatic society ', the springing up of a fresh class

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[16] ' The Future Results of the British Rule in India ', *On Colonialism*, p. 89 f.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

imbued with European science, the development of rapid communication with Europe, which brings the day nearer, when India will thus be actually annexed to the Western world, and the railways bringing an improvement for agriculture and the development of modern industry.

Several of Marx's assumptions and predictions can easily be criticized more than a century after he wrote these articles. But the value and the function of his approach should primarily be evaluated in the political and cultural context of his days, as European imperialism was still expanding. Marx, who never visited Asia and whose sources of information were rather limited, shares to a certain extent the contemporary convictions about European superiority, and he is unable to discover in the negative picture of the Asia of those days some other aspects which could have led to a more balanced judgement. However, his dialectical approach to history and his socialist universalism definitely separate him from his bourgeois contemporaries, as he does not share their moral pretensions, especially since he anticipated the liberation of the colonized countries as the next step which only can bring the consummation of what European colonialism could prepare for only in spite of itself. With the laying down of the material premises, mentioned above, the task of the bourgeoisie is finished, because it belongs to her dirty history and nature not to allow the mass of the people to share the fruits.

> The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the Britain bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether. At all events, we may safely expect to see, at a more or less remote period, the regeneration of that great and interesting country.[20]

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 88.

'In the context of this revolutionary perspective Marx recognises also positive qualities of 'calm nobility' and bravery, appreciates India as 'the source of our languages, our religions' and discovers the 'type of the ancient German in the Jat and the type of the ancient Greek in the Brahmin'.[21] Of course, even in the revolutionary perspective, Marx visualizes a leading role for the 'most advanced peoples'. But the decisive difference with the foregoing epoch is that it cannot be based on domination. As Engels said many years later :

> One thing alone is certain : the victorious proletariat can force no blessings of any kind upon any foreign nation without undermining its own victory by so doing.[22]

2. Asiatic mode of production—looking back from capitalism

In his famous preparatory studies for *Capital* written in 1857-8 and known as *Grundrisse* or 'Rough Draft', Marx reflected in another context on certain aspects of Asiatic society. These workbooks play a crucial role in the over-all interpretation of Marx as they form a link between his earlier and his later work. This applies e.g. to his concept of alienation, linking the Pariser Manuscripts with *Capital* ; it is also the case with regard to our topic of Asiatic society.[23]

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[21] *Ibid.*

[22] To Kautsky, 1882, *ibid.* p. 341.

[23] A first, limited edition of these notes was published in Moscow 1939-1941 ; a reprint of thatred. was brought out in 1953 in Berlin/GDR; the relevant passages on Asiatic mode of production are contained in *Precapitalist Economic Formations*, by Karl Marx, ed. by E. J. Hobsbawm, New York 1965 ; meanwhile a complete English ed. is available : Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft), Penguin Books and New Left Review, 1973. Quotations are taken from this edition.

In the relevant section of *Grundrisse* Marx analyses the process of Original Accumulation of Capital. In this context he discusses the forms which precede Capitalist production.[24] It is important to note from the outset that Marx does not work with a general philosophy or framework of history. His focus is a critical analysis of Capitalism, of the laws which determine the functioning of Capitalist society. His historical studies serve the purpose of explaining how Capitalism developed and what makes it different from everything before.

The presupposition of Capitalist production is free wage labour, and thus 'release of the worker from the soil as his natural workshop—hence dissolution of small, free landed property as well as of communal landownership resting on the oriental commune'.[25] Looking back from Capitalism Marx identifies any form of landed property which ties the worker to the soil as a basic characteristic of pre-Capitalist societies. This being in common he distinguishes three forms of such landed property, to which different modes of production correspond : the Asiatic, the Ancient Classical and the Germanic form. Once he mentions a Slavonic form—between the Asiatic and ancient classical form[26], but he does not discuss it separately. According to other references it can be taken as a modification of the Asiatic form.[27]

In all these forms property means the relation of the individual to the natural conditions of labour and of life as 'the objective, nature-given inorganic body of his subjectivity'[28] as his 'extended body'.[29] It is inseparable from him just as

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 471 ff.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 471.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 495.
[27] *Cf. Ibid.*, p. 497.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 473.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 491.

he is inseparable from his community. It is the opposite of Capitalism where such ties with nature and community have been severed and where land and labour have become commodities in the market.

The three forms are distinguished by the way in which landed property, community and individual are related. In the Asiatic form the community-relation is the first and only presupposition of landed property.

> The earth is the great workshop, the arsenal which furnishes both means and material of labour, as well as the seat, the *base* of the community. They relate naively to it as the *property of the community*, of the community producing and reproducing itself in living labour. Each individual conducts himself only as a link, as a member of this community as *proprietor* or *possessor*.[30]

Focusing on this community-relation Marx extends the scope of the Asiatic form beyond that of 'oriental despotism', so that it includes ' more despotic or more democratic ' realisations.[31] In ' oriental despotism ' ' the comprehensive unity standing above all these little communities appears as the higher proprietor or as the sole proprietor ', whereas the real communities are only hereditary possessors and the individuals are propertyless.[32] But the legal question of ownership does not affect so much the basic structure of the communities at the base.

> Amidst oriental despotism and the propertylessness which seems legally to exist there, this clan or communal property exists in fact as the foundation, created mostly by a combination of manufactures and agriculture within the small commune, which thus becomes altogether self-sustain-

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 472.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 473.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 472f.

ing, and contains all the conditions of reproduction and surplus production within itself. A part of their surplus labour belongs to the higher community, which exists ultimately as a person, and this surplus labour takes the form of tribute etc., as well as of common labour for the exaltation of the unity, partly of the real despot, partly of the imagined clan-being, the god.[33]

The second form, the Ancient-Classical as realized in Greece and Rome, 'also assumes the *community* as its first presupposition, but not, as in the first case, as the substance of which the individuals are mere accidents, or of which they form purely natural component parts.'[34]

There is no appropriation of land and soil without membership in the commune. But as members of the commune the individuals are private proprietors. The base of the community is not the countryside but the town, so that the cultivated land appears as territorium belonging to the town, the central seat of the citizens—landowners. In addition there is communal property as State property.

In the third form, realized by the German tribes, the commune is also presupposed, in the ancestry and the like, but it exists practically only in the periodic gathering-together of the families which are scattered through the countryside. The basic unit is neither the village community nor the city but the separate household as an independent centre of production. This type lacks a permanent political body as provided by the city in the second form. The communal property (hunting land, grazing land) 'appears only as a complement to individual property, with the latter as a base'.

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[33] *Ibid.*, p. 473.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 474.

Common to all three forms is the belonging of the individual to the commune. In all of them 'an isolated individual could no more have property in land and soil than he could speak'.[35] But what distinguishes the three forms are (1) the form of property, and (2) the relationship between town and countryside. Regarding property-relations there is (a) communal property without private property in land and soil (only possession), (b) State and private property along side each other, and (c) communal property as a complement only to private property.

The different forms of the division of labour expressed in the division between town and countryside play an important role in Marx's analysis, already in his early writings (*German Ideology*), but more elaborate here in *Grundrisse*. He summarizes the differences :

> (*a*) Asiatic history is a kind of indifferent unity of town and countryside (the really large cities must be regarded here merely as royal camps, as works of artifice erected over the economic construction proper) ;
>
> (*b*) the history of classical antiquity is the history of cities, but of cities founded on landed property and on agriculture ;
>
> (*c*) the Middle Ages (Germanic period) begins with the land as the seat of history, whose further development then moves forward in the contradiction between town and countryside.

It is the development of this contradiction which plays a crucial role in the birth of Capitalism which is linked with the growing power of the urban bourgeoisie. As Marx formulates in the present context, 'the modern age is the urbanization of the countryside, not ruralization of the city as in antiquity'.[36]

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 485.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 479.

What Marx considers next is the process of change in these pre-Capitalist societies. This is of special interest in connection with the hotly debated problem of stagnation in Asiatic society. The reproduction of the individuals which is necessary for the survival of the communities leads ' necessarily ' to ' new production and destruction of the old form '.[37] The growth of population requires wars of conquest. Slavery and serfdom, resulting from it, ' are thus only further developments of the form of property resting on the clan system ', but they lead to further changes, as can be seen clearly from the development of ancient society in Greece and Rome and of feudal society in the European Middle Ages. The development of the forces of production is part of a process of changes in all fields.

> Not only do the objective conditions change in the act of reproduction, e.g. the village becomes a town, the wilderness a cleared field etc., but the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language.[38]

Why do such changes occur so slowly, if at all, in Asiatic societies? To answer this question Marx focuses again, as in his articles, on the ' self-sustaining unity of manufacture and agriculture ' of the village as the basic structure on which the Asiatic form rests. This self-sufficiency makes conquest not such a necessary condition as where landed property and agriculture are exclusively predominant. And even when conquest takes place, no new developments result from it, because no class of slave proprietors can develop as all are themselves slaves of the despot. This 'general slavery ' under

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[37] *Ibid.*, p. 493.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 494.

the despot—which differs from the type of slavery in classical antiquity—lacks the dynamic element of a society in which a class of slave proprietors develops. In Ancient Classical and in Germanic society an individual can be or become a private proprietor, and he can lose his property. This dynamic element fails in Asiatic society.

> In the oriental form this *loss* is hardly possible, except by means of altogether external influences, since the individual member of the commune never enters into the relation of freedom towards it in which he could lose his (objective, economic) bond with it. He is rooted to the spot, ingrown.[39]

This again is reinforced by the combination of manufacture and agriculture in the village and the lack of dynamic tension between town and countryside. There are no dissolving elements at work in that combination, as long as manufacture is subsumed under landed property and tied to it. It is different in classical antiquity, where manufacture appears already independently and where productive labour 'necessarily develops through intercourse with aliens and slaves, through the desire to exchange the surplus product etc.', thus dissolving the mode of production on which the community rests.[40]

Obviously, there is a shift of emphasis in *Grundrisse* as compared to the articles and correspondence of 1853. The role of the despotic State, especially its economic function of providing public works in the field of irrigation is less stressed, whereas the self-sustaining village community takes a dominant position. Perry Anderson, in his interesting note or rather essay, "The Asiatic Mode of Production",[41] discovers even a basic new element in Marx's assumption of tribal or

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 494.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 494f.

[41] *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London, 1974, 462-549.

communal ownership of the soil by the villages behind the ' official veil of State property of land '. But this seems to be an over-interpretation out of the context. Marx does not give here a complete picture of something like an Asiatic system, but focusing on the property-relations he wants to show the ways in which in pre-Capitalist forms of society the individual is tied to the community. In these ties he identifies in the case of Asiatic society the survival of tribal patterns of communal ownership. Viewed from this angle the role of the despot is primarily characterised as providing the higher unity of the small communities, whereas its economic function and the legal question of property-rights are of secondary importance only. The essential thing here is the belonging of the individual to the small community and through it to the higher unity under the despot as well. It is true, however, that by this approach Marx is no longer discussing so much the Asiatic society of his days, as he did in 1853, but certain elements which as well can be found elsewhere and which are closer to its origins in archaic society.

After discussing later utterances of Marx regarding the Asiatic mode of production Anderson gives an useful summary of its fundamental elements in the writings of Marx :

The absence of private property in land, the presence of large-scale irrigation systems in agriculture, the existence of autarchic village communities combining crafts with tillage and communal ownership of the soil, the stagnation of passively rentier or bureaucratic cities, and the domination of a despotic State machine cornering the bulk of the surplus and functioning not merely as the central apparatus of repression of the ruling class, but as its principal instrument of economic exploitation. Between the self-reproducing villages 'below ' and the hypertrophied state 'above', dwelt no intermediate forces. The impact of the State on the mosaic of villages beneath it was purely external and tributary; its consolidation or destruction alike left rural

> society untouched. The political history of the Orient was thus essentially cyclical: it contained no dynamic or cumulative development. The result was the secular inertia and immutability of Asia, once it had attained its own peculiar level of civilization.[42]

Marx's view of the relative immutability of Asia has to be seen in connection with his whole concept of the process of human emancipation. Originally man appears 'as a species-being (Gattungswesen), clan being, herd animal'.[43] In the course of history he becomes an individual, gets released from his bondage to the earth and to the community.

> Co-operation, such as we find it at the dawn of human development, among races who live by the chase, or, say, in the agriculture of Indian communities, is based, on the one hand, on ownership in common of the means of production, and on the other hand, on the fact, that in those cases, each individual has no more torn himself off from the navelstring of his tribe or community, than each bee has freed itself from connexion with the hive.[44]

Private property and exchange are considered as the chief means of the process of 'individuation'[45] and are thus decisive factors of human progress. This process culminates, it seems, in the 'urbanization of the countryside'. Marx shared the optimism of the 19th century bourgeois metropolitan outlook without restriction. This made him proclaim the victory and superiority of urban civilization over the idiocy of rural life in the famous passage of the Communist Manifesto, which separates him not only from Gandhi but—in another sense—as well from Mao :

> The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule

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[42] *Ibid.*, p. 483.
[43] *Grundrisse*, p. 496.
[44] *Capital I*, p. 316.
[45] *Grundrisse*, p. 496.

of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeoisie, the East on the West.

Of course, there is no point in denying the cultural progress achieved by the cities nor in indulging in rural romanticism. But later developments like in China and Vietnam have shown that an exploitative and parasitic process of urbanization had to be stopped by revolutionary renewal coming from the countryside which brought the real achievements of urban civilization under the discipline of national reconstruction and of a non-exploitative relationship between towns and countryside.

Marx made the lack of private property and the self-sufficient isolation of the village communities which limited the process of exchange responsible for the absence of dynamic development in Asiatic societies. External forces, it can be concluded, which impose the process of exchange and eventually the form of private property—as it happened in India under the British—or other historical factors, are required to initiate a new historical development in these societies. This conclusion is not explicitly drawn in *Grundrisse*, and it seems that in principle Marx does not deny that these societies also carry the seeds of their dissolution within themselves. But further evolution takes place only as a luxury, as it were.[46] In any case, his emphasis is on the tenacity of these forms of society, which makes it obvious that external factors are wel-

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[46] *Hobsbawm*, p. 34.

come to speed up their dissolution. And even these external factors need a long time to make an impact :

> The obstacles presented by the internal solidity and organisation of pre-Capitalistic, national modes of production to the corrosive influence of commerce are strikingly illustrated in the intercourse of the English with India and China ... In India the English lost no time in exercising their direct political and economic power, as rulers and landlords, to disrupt these small economic communities. English commerce exerted a revolutionary influence on these communities and tore them apart only in so far as the low prices of its goods served to destroy the spinning and weaving industries, which were an ancient integrating element of this unity of industrial and agricultural production. And even so this work of dissolution proceeds very gradually. And still more slowly in China, where it is not reinforced by direct political power.[47]

3. Semi-Asiatic Russia—looking forward to Socialism

Marx's approach to history as a process of progressive development in which changing socio-economic conditions mark the steps of human emancipation led later on to various attempts of formulating an universal scheme of all historical development. It appears as if Marx himself contributed to this to a certain extent. In his famous *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) he summarizes his 'historical materialist' understanding of society and its history. In that context he says :

> In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal and bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society.[48]

Against the background of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848)

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[47] *Capital III*, pp. 333f..

[48] Marx/Engels, *Selected works*, Vol. I (Moscow 1969), p. 504.

and the preceding studies in *German Ideology*—written by Marx and Engels 1845-6 but never published during their lifetime—this was easily misunderstood as a unilinear scheme of successive epochs in history. In *Grundrisse* Marx definitely departed from a schematic perception of pre-Capitalist societies, if there was any. Prior to that he recognised only three forms of class society: the slave society of antiquity, feudalism and bourgeois society. The historical basis of this scheme is confined to classical antiquity, Western and Central Europe. But even at this stage slave society and feudalism seem to be considered as alternative routes out of primitive communal society rather than as successive stages of development of class society.[49]

The concept of the *Preface* of 1859, quoted above, is based on fresh studies during the fifties which were no longer confined to Europe. It led to the incorporation of the 'Asiatic' or 'oriental' system. The analysis in *Grundrisse* shows that Marx considers the Asiatic, Ancient and Germanic forms as alternative forms of the break-up of communal society. Altogether these pre-Capitalist forms of society are qualitatively contrasted with Capitalism. The formulation in *Preface* places them in the perspective of historical progress. Against the background of *Grundrisse* it is clear that this does not mean *successive* historical stages in a chronological sense. Marx's approach is an *analytical* one. He identifies the 'progress' of one or the other form in terms of its distance to the primitive communal society.

Compared to his early writings as *German Ideology* and *Communist Manifesto*, Marx subsequently became more

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[49] See Hobsbawm, *Introduction to Marx, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, pp. 31f. ; cf. Nguyen Thanh-Hung, *Zur Theorie der Vorkapitalistischen Produktionsweisen bei K. Marx und F. Engels*, Erlangen, Gaiganz, 1975, pp. 53ff.

cautious if not reluctant in proclaiming universal patterns, as he was aware of the tremendous role of specific historical conditions. Thus, he warns the Russian readers of *Capital* not to transform his ' historical sketch of the genesis of Capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophic theory of the general path of development prescribed by fate to all nations, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves, in order that they may ultimately arrive at the economic system which ensures, together with the greatest expansion of the productive powers of social labour, the most complete development of man.'[50]

The various developments in history have to be studied on their own terms and not with the help of his particular analysis of Western Capitalism, as if this would be a master key to all of history. Such an approach would be supra-historical altogether. In other words, one has to be specific.

That is what Marx himself tries to do with regard to Russia. The very first translation of *Capital* was published in Russia in 1872, five years after its first publication. This critical analysis of Capitalism and its picture of Capitalist exploitation raised the question among Russian intellectuals and revolutionaries, whether Russia had to go through such an agonizing period of Capitalist development before it could enter the happier state of Socialism, or whether it could skip the Capitalist stage and move directly towards a Socialist society. Did not the old village community (*mir*) which was still alive though threatened by dissolution provide a potential for Socialism ? Could not its pattern of common ownership of the land serve as the matrix of a Socialist society, which is supposed to establish common ownership on a higher level

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[50] Marx/Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow 1975, 3rd Edition p. 293.

after the expropriation of the private proprietors of the means of production? Why go through a stage of establishing private ownership if there is still a heritage of communal society? Marx was extremely puzzled and fascinated by the question and he took the trouble to study—in the Russian language—all sorts of materials related to the problem. He found it difficult to arrive at a final conclusion, as the revisions of his draft for an answer to Vera Zasulich, one of the Russian revolutionaries, show.[51] Fresh studies of the primitive commune stimulated also by new publications like those of Maurer and Morgan, had led Marx to a more positive evaluation of its potential. He starts visualizing the possibility that the despotic super-structure can be destroyed, whereas its basis, the village communes can survive and be integrated on a higher level into Socialist society.

Marx characterizes pre-revolutionary Russia of the 19th century as a 'semi-Asiatic' system. Probably he uses the qualification 'semi' because one of the elements of the Asiatic mode of production is lacking in Russia, namely that of the large irrigation-works organised by the State. The West German Marxist Rudi Dutschke refers to a Marx text edited by the Russian revolutionary Ryazanov in the year 1909 (and not published again !) called 'Karl Marx about the origin of the predominance of Russia in Europe'. In this text, Marx points at the conquest of Russia by the Tartar Mongolians and their rule from 1227 till 1462 as the decisive turning point in history which connected Russia with Asia rather than with Europe. From it resulted a semi-Asiatic society with its oriental despotism which constituted the foundation for

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[51] First Draft in Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, Volume 3, p. 152-161; the final letter in Marx/Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 319; other drafts in Marx/Engels *Werke* (German), MEW, Vol. 19.

the emergence of the Moscovite autocracy, the Russian variant of State-slavery.[52]

Later developments did not change the essence of despotism for a long time. Trade developed again, but the merchant capital involved was that of the State. Peter I promoted modernisation, but it remained superficial and served the stabilisation of the system with new means. Even the peasant emancipation of 1861 cannot be evaluated in terms of west-European history. What happened is that the State strengthened its position by establishing direct collection of taxes from the peasants—providing the means of capital formation, by destroying the power-base of the landed gentry, and by expanding the area of conscription for the army.[53] The dominance of despotic conditions was not broken but reinforced, though a process of disintegration of the village communes got under way and a certain form of Capitalism started to develop.

Thus, Marx no longer accepts the destruction of the village commune as an unavoidable part of the process of progress, as he did twenty years earlier with regard to India. On the contrary, he hopes that revolution will come in time to save and to develop the village commune ' as the regenerative force of Russian society and as something superior to those countries which are still enslaved by the Capitalist regime '.[54] In his letter to Otechestvenniye Zapiski (1877), quoted above, he formulates his opinion as follows :

> If Russia continues to pursue the path she has followed since 1861, she will lose the finest chance ever offered by

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[52] See R. Dutschke, *Versuch, Lenin auf die Füsse zu stellen*, West-Berlin, 1974.)

[53] See Notes on the Reform of 1861 in Marx/Engels *Werke* (MEW) Vol. 19, p. 417.

[54] *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 161.

> history to a people and undergo all the fatal vicissitudes of the Capitalist regime.[55]

He asserts that the laws of Capitalism are not yet inescapable for Russia. As long as the ancient communes are still alive and viable, there would be a historical chance to skip the Capitalist stage. The backwardness of Russia would not necessarily be a hindrance for a Communist development, because Russia was not isolated from the modern world and it would be able ' to incorporate into the commune all the positive achievements ' of Capitalism.[56] In his draft for a reply to Vera Zasulich, Marx also considers the problem of the isolation of the land commune in Russia as a ' localised microcosm '. This weakness is the strength of the centralised despotism which arises upon this base. But such isolation, says Marx in this context, is not an inherent feature of this type of commune. Originally it may have been dictated by the vast expanse of territory, but it was ' to a large extent consolidated by the political events which Russia went through after the invasion of the Mongols'. Surprisingly Marx goes on to say :

> Today this is an obstacle which can be very easily overcome. All that need to be done is to replace the volost (smallest unit of administration), a government institution, by an assembly of peasants elected by the communes themselves, which would serve as an economic and administrative organ to protect their interests.[57]

It seems that Marx presupposes a revolutionary tide which would bring the peasants together in the struggle against the common exploiter, the despotic State. May be this has to be seen together with his expectation that since the crisis of the

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[55] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 292.
[56] *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 157.
[57] *Ibid.*

Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 Russia was quickly approaching a revolutionary explosion.[58] (Actually this happened only in 1905 after the war with Japan.) In any case, what is most important is that Marx proposes the self-organisation of the peasants, something which was undertaken later by Mao Tse-tung and Ho Chi-minh. He recognises the revolutionary potentiality of the peasants under the Russian conditions as well because of the tremendous exploitation of the agricultural sector by the State as because of their collective patterns in the old communes, and he proposes to overcome their weakness of isolation by revolutionary organisation from below.[59]

Obviously Marx modified his judgment regarding the ' progressive ' role of Capitalism.[60] His enthusiasm in the forties for the progress brought about by bourgeois Capitalism turned into an increasingly hostile scepticism. In *Grundrisse* he still considers ' Capitalist intruders ' as a productive, transforming force. After his studies of Russia he talks about the Capitalism promoted by the Russian State not only as a threat to the peasant commune but also as something parasitic which did not contribute to the productive development of agriculture. In the first draft of his letter to Vera Zasulich he says:

> At the expense of the peasants the state has nurtured those branches of the Western capitalist system which, without developing any of the productive potential of agriculture, are most instrumental in facilitating and speeding up the plundering of agricultural produce by unproductive intermediaries. It has thus helped to enrich a new capitalist vermin sucking the blood of the already anaemic ' village commune '.[61]

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[58] *Cf.* his letter to F.A. Sorge, 27-9-1877, *Sel. Correspondence*, p. 289.
[59] *Cf.* Dutschke, p. 60.
[60] This has been noted by G. Lichtheim, ' Marx and the " Asiatic mode of production "', *St. Antony Papers*, 14, p. 98.
[61] *Sel. Works* Vol. 3, 159f..

In his essay 'On social relations in Russia' (1875) Engels discusses the same possibility of skipping the Capitalist stage, but he makes this dependent on a successful proletarian revolution in Western Europe, which on the other hand could be furthered by a political revolution in Russia destroying Tsarist despotism, the 'reserve of the entire European reaction'. He also speaks of the system of 'oriental despotism' which survived in Russia and India, in contrast to Western Europe where the fetter of communal ownership was eliminated at a certain stage of social development. He notices that communal ownership in Russia is also 'moving towards its dissolution'.

> Nevertheless, the possibility undeniably exists of raising this form of society to a higher one, if it should last until circumstances are ripe for that, and if it shows itself capable of development in such manner that the peasants no longer cultivate the land separately, but collectively ;.... This, however, can happen only if, before the complete break-up of communal ownership, a proletarian revolution is successfully carried out in Western Europe, creating for the Russian peasant the pre-conditions necessary for such a transition.[62]

Together with Marx, Engels considers—one year after the assassination of Tsar Alexander—the possibility of the commune becoming the starting point for a Communist development after the destruction of its political superstructure of despotism. In their *Preface* to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto* (1882) they write :

> If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting-point for a Communist development.[63]

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[62] *Sel. Works*, Vol.2, p. 395.
[63] *Sel. Works*, Vol. 1, p. 100f.

But in the year of Marx's death, only one year after the *Preface* just quoted was written, the first generation of Russian Marxists, led by Plekhanov, decided that Capitalist development on the West-European pattern was definitely under way in Russia and that the historical chance of skipping such a development no longer existed. The debate between the populist revolutionaries, the correspondents of Marx and Engels who believed in a non-capitalist path to Socialism (which is not to be identified with the present theory of a non-capitalist path) and the Marxists was decided in favour of the latter during the nineties, when a younger generation with Lenin and others joined their ranks at a time when the impact of Capitalist development seemed to become more and more incisive.[64] The same Marxists could not deny, of course, that in spite of the expansion of Capitalism Russia's institutional order was still 'Asiatic'. The despotism of Tsarist autocracy was still the form in which Russia was ruled. But that only strengthened their desire for a rapid Capitalist development as the major force which would break up the old system of brutal and arbitrary oppression and of stagnation in backwardness. Engels also holds later on that Capitalism definitely has become the only way for Russia and that given this fact it even 'opens out new views and new hopes'.[65] The reason he gives is that 'the West remained stagnant' (!), as it failed to bring about the proletarian revolution which could have provided the model that Russia needed for the development of a higher social form out of primitive agrarian communism.

It is certainly true that Russia in the decade after Marx's

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[64] See Lenin's major study, written in 1896-9, on the 'Development of Capitalism in Russia'.

[65] Letter to N. F. Danielson, 17-10-1893, in *Sel. Correspondence* p. 439.

death went through a process of rapid industrialization, of Capitalist development and of further disintegration of the communes. In that sense Marx's observations became obsolete. Especially after the 1905 revolution the communes were no longer a viable factor to build upon. Capitalism was definitely under way. But Dutschke is right in emphasizing that the transition to a new phase in the social development of Russian society does not mean that the peculiarities of the previous phases have suddenly ceased to exist. They continued to play a role under the changed conditions. Actually, they thwarted the development of Capitalism. In a letter to Danielson, written in 1879, Marx contrasted the unfettered development of Capitalism in the United States, rapid industrial development along with agricultural progress —with the situation in Russia which he compares with that of 18th century France under Louis XIV, ' where the financial, commercial, industrial superstructure, or rather the facades of the social edifice, looked (although they had a much more solid foundation than in Russia) like a satire upon the stagnant state of the bulk of production (the agricultural one) and the famine of the producers'.[66] The later Capitalist development in Russia continued to suffer from the conditions which were prevalent at its genesis. The industrial progress in the nineties and thereafter took place on the base of a stagnant agriculture resulting in an increasing frequency of famines. It was this structural deficiency together with the despotic structure of the State which continued to shape the development of Capitalism in Russia.

Of all Russian Marxists, Lenin came closest to such a perception of the specifics of Russian society which differed from Western Europe. As a sensitive revolutionary he smells the

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[66] *Sel. Correspondence*, p. 300.

revolutionary potential of the peasantry and he suspects the tenacity of bureaucratic structures and attitudes. Thus in his practical decisions he often takes into consideration the specifics of the Russian situation, whereas theoretically he is fixed upon the west-European orientation which is common to all Russian Marxists. According to Dutschke this divergence between theory and practice is the origin of the erroneous way taken by the Russian revolution later on. Lenin is aware of the Asiatic inheritance in Russian society. He often refers to pre-Capitalist remnants which he describes with different expressions.

With different expressions like ' semi-asiatic ', ' semi-feudal ', ' oriental ', ' asiatic ', ' patriarchal ' purely as obstacles which should be removed. The only force which has the power to remove them is capitalism. Like Marx he is aware of the Russian form of Asiatic conditions but unlike Marx who discovered some revolutionary possibility in it Lenin feels it as an agony only. He wants a quick victory of Capitalism over all-precapitalist forms of production and over the asiatic state in order to approch the proletarian revolution. ' Lenin hates the " asiatic development of capitalism " and wishes the European one '.[67]

Dutschke criticizes Lenin's study on the 'development of Capitalism in Russia ' because of its fixation upon a west-European Capitalist development which makes him neglect the specifity of Russia. Lenin seems from this point of view more of an orthodox Kautskyan taking historical materialism as economic determinism, and understanding Marx's analysis of the essence of Capitalist society as a historical chronology of the different stages of Capitalist development for all countries. This explains how Lenin can take the ' superstructure '

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[67] Dutschke, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

of Capitalist industrialisation with the help of the State as the essence of Russian society and the stagnation of the slowly disintegrating agriculture as less essential. ' Just like western Capitalism was grafted on Russia—without really changing the Russian reality—so did Lenin's reflection put the concepts which Marx had developed for bourgeois society on the non-bourgeois Russian society.'[68]

Interestingly, the same Lenin does not identify the bourgeoisie as the ruling class but speaks in a penetrating way again and again of the rule of the bureaucracy as soon as he analyses the power-structures of Russia. Thus he recognises the ' Asiatic ' character of the system. But the only conclusion he draws from this is that of the necessity of a bourgeois revolution which would destroy Tsarist autocracy as the obstacle to a normal (i.e. European) development. That is what he has in common with Plekhanov and the other Mensheviks. Both repudiate the semi-Asiatic past and are afraid of its continuation or restoration. Inspired by the revolutionary zeal shown by the peasantry during the 1905 revolution Lenin proposed to include nationalisation of the soil as a slogan in the party programme in order to recognise the revolutionary force of the oppressed peasants. Plekhanov rejected the proposal arguing that it could lead to the restoration of the Asiatic mode of production and exclaiming ' We don't want a Chinese system! ' Lenin answers that the Capitalist mode is dominant already in Russia and that the Socialist revolution in the West will be the ' only guarantee ' against an ' Asiatic restoration '.[69]

Lenin's concept of the party accords with his ambivalent analysis of Russian society. On the one hand, he opts for a

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[68] Dutschke, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 90f., 121ff.

Worker's Party based on the thesis of the revolutionary role of the industrial proletariat in Capitalist society. He demands occasionally the central organisation of the peasants[70] as the only protection of the revolution against reaction, but in practice the Bolsheviks never achieved this—as the Chinese did—nor did they seriously try to.[71] On the other hand he bases his organisational concept of democratic centralism on the specific conditions of repression under Tsarist despotism. As a centralist organisation his party has much in common with the Tsarist state, with the difference that it is limited to the Capitalist sector only, whereas the Tsarist apparatus ruled in all parts of Russian society. Because of his European outlook and his distrust of the 'Asiatic' inheritance Lenin is unable to include the peasant masses in a consistent manner in his political organisational concept. During the 1905 revolution he recognises more than others, the revolutionary potential of the peasantry as a destructive force able to strike heavy blows against the oppressive pre-Capitalist conditions under which it was suffering so much. But as they represent only the agony of 'Asiatic' reality, they do not represent a reality with a revolutionary perspective of its own. His negative judgment on the Asiatic inheritance implies an instinctive elitist distrust of the masses shaped by that inheritance. All this means that the emancipation of the masses—the only remedy against bureaucratism—is not promoted and supported in the organisational approach of Lenin, in spite of his personal sensitivity for the mood of the masses and his honesty in dealing with them.

During the war Lenin changes his mind regarding the Socialist perspective. The imperialist world war and the failure of the

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[70] See Lenin, *Works*, 13—The Agrarian program of the Social Democracy—1907.

[71] Cf. Dutschke *op. cit.*, p. 92.

Russian bourgeoisie to develop modern Capitalism convinced him that the Socialist revolution was now on the agenda for Russia as well though it had still to pass through the completion of the democratic revolution. He argues the case not on the basis of an analysis of Russian society but by analysing the role of international capital. His famous theory of imperialism is the culmination of his west-European orientation. This is not to deny the validity of a theory of imperialism, but to question the implication that international and monopolistic capital makes it superfluous to worry about the special function of the Tsarist regime and to consider the specific potential of the rural masses. By this, according to Dutschke, Lenin failed to identify a plebian rural Socialism as the way out from despotic State Capitalism.

The next step is *State and Revolution* (1917). On the one hand Lenin proclaims the necessity of smashing the old State machinery (army, secret police etc.) and he proclaims 'all power to the Soviets'. On the other hand, he is looking for the instruments created by 'Capitalist culture' to achieve the realisation of 'primitive', direct democracy on a higher level. Large-scale production, railways, postal service, telephones, banking system etc., created by Capitalism are the basis on which 'the great majority of the functions of the old "State power" have become so simplified' that these functions quite easily can be performed by every literate person for ordinary wages.[72] That is the way in which privileged officialdom—along with the standing army etc.—can be eliminated and proletarian democracy can be established. 'Workers' control' becomes the slogan and directive in the early days of the revolution, and the Soviets are supposed to become its organs and thus to form the new apparatus which should replace the old State apparatus.

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[72] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 421.

But the practical development after the conquest of power took a direction which deviated more and more from the course projected in *State and Revolution*. It is not possible here to examine the complex economic and political conditions in the years following the October-revolution of 1917, the compulsions of the civil war, the development of the class relations between industrial proletariat and different sections of the peasantry, and the developing stresses in the relation between the ruling Bolshevik party and the masses. Whatever the various causes, there is no doubt, that in the course of time the power not only became *centralized*—which was perhaps necessary —in the top organs of party, Soviet-congress and government administration, but also more and more *concentrated* at the top. The local Soviets quickly lost their substance with the increase of power in the hands of Central government organs. The party-base got more and more excluded from the decision-making process at the top, which was not only due to the conditions of civil war but also to the autonomous growth of an administrative party-apparatus under Stalin, which took place already during Lenin's lifetime. Finally, Lenin complained again and again that the leading party-organs in their turn were unable to exercise power in an effective manner because of the cumbersomeness of the bureaucracy. Lenin deeply regretted the emergence of a new bureaucratism in which he saw the survival of old Russia and the result of the inability of the Communists to use their power because of their lack of 'culture', i.e. administrative efficiency. He recalls Oblomov, a figure from Russian literature, who, on his bed, was always drawing up schemes without ever carrying them out. 'Russia has experienced three revolutions, but the Oblomovs have survived', even among Communists.[73] In the same year 1922 he writes :

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[73] *Works*, pp. 33, 223.

> If we take Moscow with its 4,700 Communists in responsible positions, and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth, they are not directing, they are being directed.[74]

The reason given by Lenin is lack of administrative ability. And the main remedies are sought in reorganisation within the party and in the promotion of a 'cultural revolution' meaning the imparting of modern skills to overcome the cultural backwardness of Russia.

4. Stalin's Codification of history

There was some debate about the Asiatic mode of production within the Communist International during the mid-twenties, i.e. at the time that the hopes of the Communists were increasingly pinned upon the revolutionary struggles in the East, especially in China. Theoretically they were not very well prepared for facing the new problems posed by societies which did not qualify for Communist action according to orthodox theory. Lenin himself was one of the first European revolutionaries to foster hopes regarding the revolutionary contribution of the peoples of the East to the struggle against Imperialism. He writes about China in the very first issue of his illegal journal *Iskra* in the year 1900, and he turns to the East as often as his expectations regarding the Socialist revolution in the West dwindle down. In his last article 'Better fewer but better' he predicts the victory of Socialism determined by the fact that Russia, India, China etc., i.e. the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe 'during the past few years.....has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity'.[75]

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[74] *Ibid.*, p. 288.

[75] Lenin, *Collected Works*, 33, p. 500.

At about the same time he emphasises that the pattern of this revolutionary development towards the East exhibits certain peculiarities.

> Because Russia stands on the border-line between the civilised countries and the countries which this war (1914-18) has for the first time definitely brought into the orbit of civilisation—all the Oriental, non-European countries—she could and was, indeed, bound to reveal certain distinguishing features; although these, of course, are in keeping with the general line of world development, they distinguish her revolution from those which took place in the West-European countries and introduce certain partial innovations as the revolution moves on to the countries of the East.[76]

In the debate on the national and colonial question at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920 Lenin had proclaimed the possibility that backward countries—with the aid of the victorious revolutionary proletariat in the advanced countries—might ' go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to Communism, without having to pass through the Capitalist stage'.[77]

The practical question involved was, with whom should the small Communist movements in the Eastern countries ally themselves. The Comintern tended to promote co-operation with bourgeois-democratic nationalist movements, like the Indian National Congress in India and the Kuomintang (KMT) in China. As long as revolution remains a remote prospect the debate about the allies may appear to be rather academic, but as soon as it becomes imminent wrong alliances may turn out to be fatal. In China a close alliance had been established between the Chinese Communist Party

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[76] ' Our Revolution ', *ibid.*, p. 477.

[77] V. I. Lenin, *Speeches at Congresses of the Communist International*, Moscow, 1972, p. 59.

(founded in 1921) and the KMT under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen. China was considered to be 'semi-colonial' and 'semi-Feudal' and therefore the national bourgeoisie was looked on as an ally in the struggle against semi-Feudalism and imperialism. These assumptions were based on the European experience in which the bourgeoisie indeed carried forward the democratic movement against Feudalism. However, a few voices were heard against this view of China. Ryazanov, the famous editor of Marx texts mentioned already, and Varga, the Hungarian economist, wrote some articles in Comintern-publications in which they emphasized the 'Asiatic' elements in Chinese society. But apparently they did not cut any ice. All the time through, including the time after the bloody putsch of Chiang Kai-shek against the CCP in the year 1927, the Comintern stuck to the qualification 'semi-feudal', 'semi-colonial'. Mao Tse-tung, too, did not officially deviate from this vocabulary, though he worked out a different strategical approach. Apparently, he did not use the categories of the Asiatic mode of production or of any other theoretical concept to identify the background for the difference in approach.

The relevance of the question, however, is obvious. If 'Asiatic' structures were still predominant, class-alliances would appear in a different light. It would mean that the bourgeoisie was unable to play an independent progressive role, but that it either had to collaborate with Imperialism as the compradore bourgeoisie actually did, or as in the case of merchants and artisans, with the dominating bureaucracy. This would mean that only an alliance of the urban proletariat with the oppressed peasant masses—as practically demanded and promoted by Mao—would be feasible.[78] All in all, it

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[78] See for these reflections Ulrich Vogel, *Zur Theorie der Chinesischen Revolution ; Die Asiatische Produktionsweise und ihre Zersetzung durch den Imperialismus*, Frankfurt/M., 1974.

can be said that the Communists of that time were too busy defending the revolution in Russia and promoting revolution elsewhere to spend much time studying in depth the societies in which they were operating.

In the early thirties several scientific conferences in the Soviet Union were devoted to the topic of the Asiatic mode of production. The outcome was that the concept was removed from the official doctrinal body of Marxist theory. It was declared to be an Asiatic variety of Feudalism or of slavery. Varga, who defended the concept denies these conferences the necessary competence. He especially blames the participants for not understanding the dialectical method of Marx in spite of quoting him so often.[79] What were the reasons behind this debate? After Lenin's death fierce battles were fought within the Communist party over the course of policies to be followed in the Soviet Union. At the same time—and mixed up with it—there was the struggle for power between Stalin and his various opponents. The main issues were the question of agricultural policy, the path and pace of industrialisation to be followed, and the relation between both problems. Until 1928 the New Economic Policy introduced by Lenin in 1921 continued in spite of many confusing twist and turns in policies regarding the different sections of the peasantry. It gave the peasants some scope to produce for the market, to slighty improve their living standards and to regulate their own affairs to a certain extent. During this period a revival of the functioning of the *mir* in the allocation of lands etc. could be noted.[80] But the New Economic Policy also led to the stabilization of the rich peasants, whereas the

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[79] See 'The Asiatic Mode of Production' in Y. Varga, *Politico-Economic Problems of Capitalism*, Moscow, 1968, p. 337.

[80] See M. Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*, London, 1968, p. 26.

lot of the poor peasants did not improve but continued to suffer as before. Later the so-called *kulaks* were singled out as the scapegoat for the crisis of agriculture. In fact, the huge mass of middle peasants and even the poor peasants were part of the problem, as their expectations and objectives were in conflict with the objectives of the ruling party to whom they had given their support during the revolution. Finally, Stalin opted for radical collectivization and implemented this decision with an unprecedented revolution from above in which the State power was used to wage a war against the peasantry, liquidating millions of them and forcing the others into *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz*. The peasantry offered tenacious resistance, but after four years their fate was sealed. The ongoing difficulties in Soviet agriculture indicate that the peasantry has not yet become an enthusiastic supporter of the system that attacked them in such a violent way. In the course of events Stalin definitely established himself as dictator, following up the victory of the State apparatus over the peasants with the liquidation of the core of the old Bolshevik party, replacing it by a bureaucratic apparatus of his own.

These incisive innovations asked for ideological justification. Stalin's codification of Marxism-Leninism, including the theory of the five basic formations, are serving this purpose. The elimination of Marx's reflections on an Asiatic mode of production are a small but illuminating part of it. Of course, Stalin did not start from scratch. He projected himself as the only heir of orthodox Marxism as applied by Lenin. Marxism had become a simplified set of doctrines in the process of popularization and appropriation by the workers' movement long before. The necessity of popularization cannot at all be questioned. In the workers' movement there is no place for elitist conceit, and the Marxist concept of the interaction of theory and practice does not allow for ivory towers.

for intellectuals. However, it has been a tremendous problem for the Marxist oriented workers' movement to keep and develop an open-minded, creative and inquisitive attitude in analysing the problems before the movement and in widening the scope of analysis according to the scientific standards set by Marx and at the same time satisfy the needs of a political mass-movement of mostly poorly educated workers looking for clear slogans and ready-made answers. Marx certainly did not intend to reserve the job of scientific analysis for party-leaders and intellectuals, while leaving the workers with the slogans and without any means to form their own judgment. Engels once blamed some intellectuals for using the phrase of historical materialism without studying history carefully, saying :

> It often seems as if these gentlemen think anything is good enough for the workers. If these gentlemen only knew that Marx thought his best things were still not good enough for the workers, and that he considered it a crime to offer the workers anything but the very best!...[81]

It is the very meaning of Marxist theory as an instrument of emancipation to give insight so that people stop acting blindly. Marxists, therefore, cannot be satisfied with replacing action in blind spontaneity through action in blind obedience to slogans given by the leaders. Actually, what distinguishes Marxist parties from almost all other parties is their tremendous emphasis on schooling. The problem, however, has been that the schooling as usual tended to focus on teaching a set of doctrines only rather than developing along with it the ability of critical understanding. The popularization often did not include a training to use the Marxist tools of analysis, by involving people, each according to his abilities, in the process of research and theoretical reflection. In fact, many

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[81] 1890 ; *Selected Correspondence*, p. 394.

theoreticians themselves developed into doctrinaires. Engels, in his later days, clearly recognised that Marxist theory was threatened by this danger. He himself had done a great deal to interpret and popularize Marx's theory for a larger constituency. It is often suggested that he by doing so already contributed to the distortion of that theory. But a series of relevant remarks in letters written between 1890-95 show that he did not intend to popularize Marxism at the cost of its scientific spirit. He emphasizes that ' the materialist method turns into its opposite if it is not taken as one's guiding principle in historical investigation but as a ready-made pattern according to which one shapes the facts of history to suit oneself.[82] Or in a letter to Sombart in 1894 he writes about Marx :

> But his way of viewing things is not a doctrine but a method. It does not provide ready-made dogmas, but criteria for further research and the method *for* this research.[83]

He especially warns against deriving everything from the economic base in an undialectical causal framework of understanding.

> What these gentlemen all lack is dialectics. They always see only cause here, effect there. That this is an empty abstraction, that such metaphysical polar opposites exist in the real world only during crises, and that the whole vast process goes on in the form of interaction—though of very unequal forces, the economic movement being by far the strongest, the primary and the most decisive—and that in this context everything is relative and nothing absolute—they cannot grasp at all.[84]

The production and reproduction of real life, i.e. the economic base, is only the ' *ultimately* determining factor in history',

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[82] 1890 ; *Selected Correspondence*, p. 390f.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 455.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 402.

but by no means the '*only* detremining one'. That would make the materialist conception of history 'meaningless, abstract, absurd'.[85] Politics, legislation and jurisdiction, philosophy, tradition and religion are ultimately determined by the material base, but they also develop a relative independence and have their impact upon the course of historical struggles.

> Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant—the historical event.[86]

Engels admits that 'Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it', because this new insight had to be defended against all sorts of critics. But this blame applies only to the presentation of the theory of historical materialism. In the actual application of it they never neglected the complexity of interaction. That is why Engels recommends the study of the original sources, such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, *Anti-Dühring*, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* etc.[87]

Lenin had been taught Marxism in the school of Kautsky and Plekhanov who were the leading theoreticians at the end of the 19th century and who had put Marxism in the form of economic and philosophical doctrines. They had a strong deterministic overtone which assured the inevitable progress of history and the final victory of Socialism, in the period of failing revolutionary upheavals. But in the turmoil of pre-revolutionary Russia, Lenin developed a much more dialectical understanding of Marxist theory in spite of these initial

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[85] *Ibid.*, p. 394. [86] *Ibid.*, p. 395. [87] *Ibid.*, p. 396.

handicaps. Whatever the shortcomings discussed above Lenin used Marxist theory as a tool of analysis facing the dilemmas and opportunities of a complicated and unprecedented situation. He realised that the ever changing situation required ever new analysis. He repeatedly blames his followers that they stick to the guidelines which were developed on the base of the situation prevailing a few years back, taking them as eternal Bolshevik doctrines. This reveals an old dilemma : the result of the analysis of a particular situation summarised in a particular slogan turns into a doctrine which blocks the understanding of new situations. Lenin himself had the necessary flexibility and independence, but he seems to have failed to promote the same attitude of critical analysis and reflection among his followers.

In any case Stalin domesticated the revolution by canonizing Lenin and incorporating the history of his political work into the doctrinal system of Marxism-Leninism. He introduced his own theoretical adaptations to the changing situation, but he did this under the veil of unfailing orthodoxy. At the time of the conquest of power all Bolsheviks shared the conviction that their revolution in a backward country like Russia could survive only under two conditions: a Socialist revolution in the West would follow soon, and the working masses of the peasantry would support the revolutionary state. The rapprochement of the latter was sought by the NEP. By 1923 the failure of the Communist uprising in Germany buried the last hopes on the Socialist revolution in the West for the time being. One year later Stalin started formulating his theory of 'Socialism in one country'. In fact there were good reasons for his position under the given conditions. The problem was that he did not build his case so much on such reasons but rather on a collection of scattered quotations from Lenin taken out of their context. For

whatever reason, Stalin was successful with this theory and defeated Trotsky and others whose waiting for the world revolution appeared as scepticism regarding the future of revolutionary Russia as a Socialist country. After several years of debate the famous First Five Year Plan was launched in 1929. It was designed to promote heavy industry as the base for the independence of Socialist Russia and thus for its survival amidst of surrounding Capitalism. The burden for this was mainly placed upon the shoulders of the peasantry.

The point at stake in the present context is neither the practical feasibility of Stalin's policy nor its achievements nor the price in human life paid for it. All this needs careful analysis and consideration. But here we are concerned with Stalin's operations in the ideological field. They can be described as a campaign to stamp out any doubts regarding the wisdom of his political decisions and to eliminate the possibility of critical opposition on the theoretical level. It was part of the huge mobilization of all resources towards the fulfillment of the Plan. Everything should be subordinated to this gigantic task. Stalin's codification of Marxism-Leninism was designed to engender an unwavering optimism which would overcome whatever sceptical doubts would be lingering regarding the possibility of building up an independent, powerful Socialist country under conditions of backwardness, international isolation and against the majority of the population. The iron laws of history reinforced by the laws of nature should provide the scientific justification for the prescribed optimism. They did not allow the chosen course to fail. The core of Stalin's codex can be found in his famous *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. In contrast to Marx, Stalin starts from dialectical materialism as a philosophy of nature which he calls the ' world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party'. Historical materialism is defined as ' the extension of the principles

of dialectical materialism to the study of social life'.[88] The history of society becomes a subdivision of the history of nature, an extension of it. This is a reversal of the approach of Marx. He looked primarily upon nature from the perspective of man's historical development in society. For him materialism means first of all to conceive reality as 'human sensuous activity, practice'.[89] In his criticism of Feuerbach he emphasizes that the material world should not be looked upon as something given from all eternity—though he does not challenge of course the priority of external nature—but as 'the product of industry and of the state of society', i.e. as affected by man in his interaction with nature.[90] That is also the view which prevails in *Capital*, when Marx speaks about nature as 'one of the organs' of man's activity, as his tool house[91] and of technology as disclosing man's 'mode of dealing with Nature'.[92] On the other hand, Marx speaks of the 'evolution of the economic formation of society' as "a process of natural history' and of the 'natural laws of Capitalist production' that are 'working with iron necessity towards inevitable results.'[93] But these 'natural laws' are not the laws of nature working in history but the laws which belong to the nature of the Capitalist mode of production. As such they are inescapable wherever this mode of production has become dominant. Marx uses the expression "natural history' in order to indicate that the basic motions which govern the economic life of a particular form of society, though result of human action, are independent of individual intentions, actions and responsibilities. Repeatedly, Marx

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[88] Calcutta, 1974, p. 1.
[89] Theses on Feuerbach, 1845, in *Selected Works*, I, p. 13.
[90] *German Ideology*, 1845, *ibid*, p. 28.
[91] *Capital* Vol. I, p. 175).
[92] *Ibid.*, p. 352.
[93] Preface to the first German edition of *Capital*, 1867, I, pp. 21 and 19.

and Engels draw a parallel between their discovery of the laws at work in the realm of society and those which the natural sciences have found in the realm of nature. But basically this is meant as an *analogy* as to underline the scientific character of their own theory of society. Apart from that Engels has laboured to show that the dialectical method is equally appropriate to evaluate the latest progress of the natural sciences. He applies the principles of the study of society to that of nature, ' which is hereby recognised also as a historical progress of development '. At the same time he makes a crucial distinction between the history of society and that of nature. ' In the history of society.....the actors are all endowed with consciousness, are men acting with deliberation or passion, working towards definite goals.' This is important for detailed historical investigation. However, it does not change the fact that ' the course of history is governed by inner general laws '.[94]

Stalin proceeds in a different way. He formulates the principles of dialectics and of materialism with regard to nature and then applies them to society. Dialectics holds ' that nature is not a state of rest and immobility, stagnation and immutability, but a state of continuous movement and change, of continuous renewal and development, where something is always arising and developing, and something always disintegrating and dying away'.[95] Applied to society it means that ' the dying away of the old and the upgrowth of the new is a law of development'.

Hence, the Capitalist system can be replaced by the Socialist system, just as at one time the Feudal system was replaced by the Capitalist system. Hence, we must not base our

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[94] Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, 1888, in *Selected Works*, p. 3, 365f.
[95] *Ibid*, p. 3.

> orientation on the strata of society which are no longer developing, even though they at present constitute the predominant force, but on those strata which are developing and have a future before them, even though they at present do not constitute the predominant force.[96]

In the next passage this is explained in terms of the proletariat as the developing class and the peasantry as a disintegrating force. ' Hence, in order not to err in policy, one must look forward, not backward.'[97] This is the point where nobody should raise further questions about the dialectics of old and new, backward and forward. Otherwise it could happen *f.i.* that the old State apparatus would be identified as the historical obstacle which had become obsolete and deserved to be destroyed, as proposed by Lenin in *State and Revolution*, instead of the peasantry which belonged to the victims of the old despotic order. It is for such reasons that Stalin in the same pamphlet proclaims the ' five main types of relations of production ' while omitting in his indirect reference to Marx the Asiatic mode of production. It would focus attention on the past of a despotic State and on the revolutionary claims of a peasantry exploited by the State. It would furthermore disturb the uniform and lawful pattern of uninterrupted dynamic historical development which Stalin needs to stress. He changes Marx's categories of analysis into a chain of iron laws connecting unavoidably all successive stages of history through the power of an immanent dialectical process. The dialectics of nature as seen by Stalin does not allow for stagnation and deviation, as Marx's dialectics of history do.

The function of this theory is to justify the optimism regarding the construction of Socialism and a good conscience re-

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[96] *Ibid*, p. 8.
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

garding the forceful methods employed. In the words of a recent GDR-publication :

> The Marxist-Leninist theory of the development of the basic formations of society substantiates essentially the optimism of the Communist world movement, by showing that the history of mankind follows a course of successive stages.[98]

By the same means this theory serves the purpose of condemning all criticism which raises questions, discusses different options and the like. The only thing needed is to follow the leader or the party who cannot fail to be in tune with the law of history. No escape from success is possible.

No doubt, there is something extremely powerful and dynamic in Stalin's approach. It enjoins to identify the forces of the future and to act in accordance with them. It forbids discouragement by any obstacles of the past which may still be dominant in the present but are doomed to disintegrate and to die away. The laws of development guarantee the victory and this reassuring knowledge releases the energies needed for the battles of the day. But they also obscure the a-historical arbitrariness in the identification of old and new, backward and forward, and they justify the ruthlessness in dealing with obstacles, which may be millions of people who are considered to be doomed by history anyway, so that it does not matter if terror quickens the pace of their perishing. Here the dialectics of nature being applied to society reveal their inhuman and immoral implications, as opposed to the dialectics of human emancipation through class struggle which have their inbuilt checks. Finally, it is this absence of man in the calculation and codification of history which made the

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[98] *Ökonomisches Lexikon*, 1969, quoted in Vogel, *Zur Theorie der Chinesischen Revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

dynamism of Stalin counterproductive and turned it into its opposite. Stalinism brought the construction of Socialism to a deadlock : being based on terror and fear it could not promote the emancipation of man to the extent of the prospects and promises of Socialism.

The reversal of dynamism into its opposite can also be found in the way in which Stalin's Russia codifies the story of its own revolution. In the impressive museums dedicated to the memory of Lenin and of the October Revolution many things are depicted in moving details. What has disappeared is the dynamics of revolutionary history. Comrades representing different options at various stages are removed from the pictures and records. History offered only one option, the one taken by Lenin, and he never failed, he never needed to correct any decision. All his life he developed one straight course, following and incorporating the iron will of history. And his only heir is Stalin, who indeed made a mummy out of Lenin. After his death Stalin in his turn got removed—at least partly—from the records, but the same rigid picture of history as an unilinear process without real dilemmas still dominates the museums.

In one sense Stalin succeeded in bringing Russia on the same road which the more developed Capitalist Countries of the West had gone before. The Soviet Union became an industrial power under his leadership. At the same time the way in which it developed revealed some peculiarities which evoked the memory of Tsarist Russia. Lenin's warnings against Stalin at the end of his life, referring to the danger of bureaucratism and of Great-Russian chauvinism were kept a secret. But not much was needed for those acquainted with earlier debates to conclude from the powerful role of the bureaucracy that the Soviet regime under Stalin's leadership was in acute danger of reviving elements of ' oriental despo-

tism'. This must have been one further reason—apart from the demands of the five-stages logic—for the elimination of the concept of Asiatic mode of production from Marxist theory in the early thirties. Actually Karl A. Wittfogel, a former follower of Plekhanov, made this charge during the fifties in his book *Oriental Despotism*.[99] In any case, the decision to build up a modern industrialised Socialist society in Russia by a bureaucratic revolution from above and by the exploitation of the peasantry was such a daring deviation from former principles of Socialist theory that it needed the dogmatics of universal determinism to hide its possible connections.

This criticism does not imply that there was not a strong challenge to the survival of the Soviet power in the long run if the nurturing of the better-off sections of the peasantry would have gone unchecked. No doubt, something had to be undertaken to stop the development of a powerful rich peasant stratum. The question is whether Socialism can be achieved by making the whole of society an object of transformation by sheer force. After a while the Chinese Communists chose their own way in combining the development of industry and agriculture without victimising the peasants. The very fact that they claimed the possibility of an alternative made the ideological struggle between them and the successors of Stalin so furious. It meant a basic challenge to the uniformity which guaranteed orthodoxy as well as the leading authority of the CPSU.

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[99] Yale University Press, 1957. This book could not be consulted for this study. It seems that Wittfogel—in a typical renegade manner—gives a very distorted picture of Marx's concept of the Asiatic mode of production and himself applies it in an unqualified and unhistorical manner.

5. Recent discussions : back to Marx and Beyond

Three decades after the official dismissal of the Asiatic mode of production and a few years after Stalin's death Y. Varga raised the question why Marx's teaching on this matter had been abandoned and ignored. In an article 'The Asiatic mode of production' he reviews the debate of the early thirties and concludes that no valid reason had been given for this.[100] He discusses the Asiatic mode primarily as a question of fairness to Marx and does not include the problem of application to the Russian past since that way has been blocked for party Marxists by the attack of Wittfogel. In fact, the reopening of the debate on the Asiatic mode of production is first of all part of a larger movement of returning to the sources, of digging into Marx himself. This happened in the course of destalinization and was the most effective and most promising way of getting rid of Stalin's dogmatism. The French Marxist Roger Garaudy, at that time still member of the French Politburo, introduced the discussion on the Asiatic mode in France by saying that the substance of Marxism itself was at stake. The universal five-stages-scheme as canonized by Stalin had transformed historical materialism into a deterministic philosophy of history in which the whole history including the future was written already and in which man, therefore, was absent.[101]

Returning to Marx and restoring man to his role as subject of history Marxists developed a new interest in history and the richness of human experiences and achievements, and they attempted to develop theoretical instruments for tackling the

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[100] See Y. Varga, *Politico-Economic Problems of Capitalism*, Moscow, 1968, pp. 330-351.

[101] See Préface, *Sur le Mode de Production Asiatique*, Centre d'-Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes, Editions Sociales, Paris, 1969.

questions involved. Theoretically, there was a great need to have a Marxist analysis of the rich historical material collected since the days of Marx, not least in the field of oriental societies. The practical relevance of such analysis had become more and more obvious with regard to the national liberation movements and the new independent states in Asia and Africa. Meanwhile, the discussion has spread out in many directions. It brought a deeper understanding of Marx's reflections as discussed above, and also of their limitations. The latter applies especially to the historical material on which Marx built his case.

The discussion has gone beyond Marx. Marxist scholars of history, embarrassed long since by the strait-jacket of the five-stages-scheme, had taken to the category of the Asiatic mode of production in order to accommodate phenomena which they could not place before. In the process the concept changed. In fact, it has been over-stretched beyond its possibilities. Marx himself extended it—in *Grundrisse*—to Mexico, Peru, and Celtic societies, while shifting his emphasis from the bureaucratic state to the autarkic villages.

The present debate follows this tendency of extension according to Anderson in two directions: (1) One trend includes Ancient societies of the Middle East and the Mediterranean prior to the classical epoch (like Sumerian Mesopotamia, Pharaonic Egypt, Hittite Anatolia, Mycenaean Greece, Etruscan Italy). It keeps the emphasis on the centralized State and the general form of slavery connected with it. (2) A second trend includes primitive State organizations of tribal or semi-tribal social formations with a much lower level of civilization (like Polynesian islands, African chieftainries etc.). In this case the focus is on communal property and village communities.[102]

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[102] See P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, p. 485.

Anderson is certainly right in saying that in this way the concept of Asiatic mode of production has been inflated even more than that of Feudalism, to cover phenomena which are as different as a Polynesian tribal system and a Chinese empire. What happened is that the scholars involved did not radically break with the five-stages-scheme but simply added one more category, protected by the authority of Marx, in the hope that this would cover all that did not fit into the former scheme. This corresponds to some extent with the way in which the Asiatic mode of production functioned for Marx himself as something which identified those non-European forms which he could not account for in any other way. This, of course, cannot be the final solution.

Anderson draws the conclusion that the Asiatic mode of production should be dismissed altogether because of this and other inconsistencies. It should not be replaced by any other scheme which would again hamper Marxist analysis of history. Each particular society should be studied in its own historical context and on its own terms before further attempts should be made to arrive at more general categories of historical analysis. But it is doubtful whether Marxists can dispense so easily with a general framework of analysis.

The Vietnamese scholar Nguyen Thanh-Hung tries to go another way.[103] He also completely rejects the five-stages-scheme but he is unwilling to give up the formulation of universal categories altogether. He builds his case upon some remarks of Marx in one of his drafts for a letter to Vera Zasulich, in which he makes a distinction between qualitatively different phases in the development of pre-Capitalist societies, namely that of an ' archaic ' and that of a ' secondary ' economic formation. The archaic phase would contain all forms

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[103] See note 49

of society based on economic and social equality, i.e. all forms of classless society. The Asiatic village community is one of the left-overs of this archaic period, according to Marx, but it is not identical with the Asiatic mode of production. It is only the starting point for what under certain historical conditions in the secondary phase of developing class-contradictions leads to that particular form of exploitation through the despotic State which has been called the Asiatic mode of production. Nguyen Thanh-Hung identifies the ' secondary ' formation with all the different pre-Capitalist forms of class-society, i.e. all those forms which are no longer based on classless equality and not yet dominated by the rule of capital. In spite of their differences they have one thing in common and that is the domination of landed property. He refers to Marx's methodological reflections in ' A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy ',[104] where Marx contrasts the analysis of capital as the economic power that dominates everything in bourgeois society with the role of landed property in previous societies. There is a basic qualitative difference :

> In all forms in which landed property is the decisive factor, natural relations still predominate; in the forms in which the decisive factor is capital, social, historically evolved elements predominate.

According to Nguyen Thanh-Hung the Asiatic, Ancient and Feudal modes of production are only variations within this one economic formation which is based on landed property. Other variations would be conceivable. Such variations are not logically or necessarily connected with each other in a successive order. This guarantees a flexible approach to history, just like Marx in *Grundrisse* discusses

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[104] 1859 ; see edition Moscow 1970, p. 213.

several variations of pre-Capitalist society, whereas at the same time a general framework for the understanding of history has been maintained.

The Vietnamese author touches also upon an aspect of the debate which lurks behind many contributions. Marx had characterized Asiatic society as being stagnant and almost unchangeable. This sounds like a verdict of European superiority over non-European lack of dynamic development. This implication led the French scholars mentioned above to reject 'stagnation' as a basic characteristic of the concept of Asiatic mode of production which they wanted to re-introduce.

> Exactly on this point we don't hesitate to say that Marx sometimes could carry a pessimistic judgment on the ancient oriental societies, from which we dissociate ourselves.

They refer to the impressive development of productive forces which these ancient societies achieved. Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Vietnam and others developed at that stage the most brilliant civilizations with the introduction of new forms of agriculture and of architecture, and with the development of arithmetics, scripts, trade, money, laws and new religions.

> Therefore, under numerous forms, the Asiatic mode of production signifies in its origin not stagnation, but, according to us, the greatest progress of the productive forces (which could be) achieved *on the base* of the ancient communitarian forms of production.[105]

It seems that these scholars are overshooting their mark somewhat in their zeal to establish the positive aspects of the Asiatic mode by denying any necessary stagnation. The word stagnation is indeed unfair as it stems from the comparison

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[105] M. Godelier, *Sur le 'Modede Production Asiatique'*, p. 89.

with the dynamism of Western Capitalism. But it has a moment of truth which could be expressed in a more neutral manner by the word stability, as it refers to the slowness of change in pre-Capitalist societies and especially in those societies that are based on communities which by the strength of their self-sufficiency are able to resist change and destruction with great tenacity. That is what Marx saw as an obstacle in India and what he learned to see as a chance in Russia two decades later. The confusion has been created by the qualification 'Asiatic'. The proposal has been made to replace this by the functional term 'tributary'.[106] In any case, the basic contrast is not Western-Asiatic but Capitalist-pre-Capitalist. The dynamism of Capitalism is something unprecedented in history according to Marx. In comparison with it 'all earlier modes of production were essentially conservative.'

> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without continually revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production and all the social relations. Conservation, in an unaltered form, of the old modes of production was on the contrary the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolution in production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.[107]

This supports the view of Nguyen Thanh-Hung who also challenges the assumption of 'stagnation' being something typically 'Asiatic'. He refers to the European image of Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries as it was promoted by Montesquieu, Hegel and others, whereas Marx recognized a tendency to stagnation in all pre-Capitalist societies. To accept the possibility of stagnation becomes only a problem if the five-

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[106] See I. Banu, *ibid.*, p. 285.
[107] Quotation from *Communist Manifesto* in *Capital* I, p. 457.

stages-dogma has to be adopted, in which, 'stagnation' means the interruption of the unilinear progress according to iron laws. That is why Marx's views about the Orient had to be suppressed. Nguyen Thanh-Hung himself prefers the expression ' retardation ' for the peculiar form of stagnation in Asiatic society as described by Marx and he makes a plea for further detailed studies about its historical causes.

In any case, the return to Marx and his concept, with the freedom of revisions where needed, is an important step forward. It has created better conditions for a Marxist evaluation of specific elements in the history and character of Asian and other non-European societies without imposing Europe-centred criteria for progress, human development and so on.

The latter is still the case in Ferenc Tökei's study, 'On the question of Asiatic mode of production '.[108] Tökei bases his judgment on Asiatic societies upon the idea that only Europe took the typical way of human development :

> The oriental development can be compared only with the development of the whole of Europe, because the latter is upto the time of Capitalism essentially identical with the general development of mankind.[109]

Caught in the unilinear concept of progress Tökei infers from the universal impact of Capitalism that only the history of the West which brought about Capitalism represents human progress. But he differs—interestingly—from the traditional approach by saying that European history is not a matter of natural development. According to him the problem is not so much to explain the absence of such development in other parts of the world, but rather to discover the special

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[108] *Zur Frage der Asiatischen Produktionsweise*, Neuwied und Berlin, 1969; Budapest, 1965.
[109] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

historical factors which brought about the typical but unique Greek development at the beginning of European history. He considers it typical in the sense that ' it secured advance at the earliest occasion '.[110] Europe is thus the historical exception and the model of mankind. Without a constellation of special conditions or in case of a less fortunate coincidence of factors an ambiguous, inconsistent development takes place which necessarily means stagnation.[111] Such stagnation can only be overcome by external factors. Historically the conquests of Greece and Rome did not succeed in that, so that it was left to Capitalism to break the isolation and stagnation of those other societies. Thus it is Capitalism which 'prepares the ground for the world victory of Socialism to bring the further uniform development of all mankind'.[112]

The only concession Tökei makes is that within their isolation the Asiatic societies were able to develop certain aspects which are common to all mankind to a certain extent, such as some Feudal or Capitalist elements. But they could not overcome their basic stagnation in so far as they lack 'history' as compared with human development as a whole.[113] Tökei illustrates his theory with an interpretation of Chinese history. Finally he reaches the political point where he starts giving warnings and advice to the Chinese Communists, in the style of a man who believes that salvation, even Socialist salvation, comes exclusively from Europe. He refers to the T'ai-p'ing revolt in the 19th century—which the Chinese Communists keep in high esteem—as the founding of a peasant state on the base of common property of land and soil. It looked like an 'ideal, democratic form of "Asiatic" society' without the class-rule of the old bureaucrats. But quickly this ideal

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[110] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[111] *Ibid*, p. 82.
[112] *Ibid.*, p. 83.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 114f.

system went the way which each Chinese dynasty has to go, the way to a new exploitative bureaucratic system. After a few other remarks Tökei warns the Chinese Communist Party to be aware of the hereditary traits of the 'Asiatic' past. He seems to consider the active participation of the peasants in the Chinese revolution as a risk rather than a factor which could help to overcome the past. On the other hand, Tökei does not see the dangers confronting ' Asiatic ' bureaucratism in the Soviet Union. The basic reason why no new exploitative bureaucracy can emerge is that in Socialist society the rural isolation and all its implications which constituted the base of the old oriental society have disappeared or are in the process of extinction.[114] But he mentions, at least, that Lenin saw the danger of bureaucratism and refers in this context to the counter-balancing task of the Soviets.

Of course, there is no reason to avoid the analysis of negative features of Asiatic societies out of courtesy, just as there is no point in denying that the specific history of Europe produced an outstanding development of productive forces. But the insights gained in the recent discussions could help to correct the assumption that its way of developing the productive forces is the only condition for the construction of Socialism and the only measure of human progress while any other pattern of productive and human advance is without historical perspective. Whatever the particular historical heritage, it will carry its own disadvantages along with its advantages, or its own chances in spite of many obstacles in its relation to the construction of Socialism. Marx himself, who hailed Capitalism so exuberantly for its productive capacity, became more and more negative about its other aspects. The experience of Eastern Europe suggests that the Capitalist

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[114] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

past is not only a stepping-stone towards Socialism but also a millstone around the neck of Socialist mankind. A fetishist attitude towards technology, economic growth and consumerism which stiffles a creative development of Socialism is one of the obstructive legacies of Capitalism, from the past and from the present in the West, which goes largely unrecognized in its negative impact. The burden of bureaucratism, however, is not necessarily the only legacy of pre-Capitalist society. E.g. Vietnamese Communists could draw upon the pre-Capitalist resources of social relations in the villages to support their drive for a Socialist society. This falls in line with the deliberations of Marx regarding the positive potential in the survival of communal relations in Russia, which he, unfortunately, did not directly link with a reappraisal of the 'Asiatic' mode of production.

Anderson is certainly right by stating that the concept of 'Asiatic mode of production' cannot cover all the different forms of pre-Capitalist, non-Feudal societies. This has been well established by now. But this does not mean that the previous attempts to evaluate the rich historical material with the help of this concept have been useless. Making up the balance the following elements should be kept in mind:

(1) It has been shown that societies based upon certain pre-Capitalist modes of production, which so far have been called Asiatic or tributary, were able to make impressive progress in the development of productive forces in their own way. Jean Chesneaux takes up the results of Joseph Needham's studies of traditional Chinese sciences and tries to relate them to the concept of 'Asiatic' society by suggesting that the sublime sophistication of the old Chinese sciences corresponds with the rational way in which the central power ruled using certain mechanisms without interfering directly with the life of the local communities. The Chinese scientific

discoveries are based on a similar rational attitude of non-interference with nature in a direct way, but using the mechanisms of nature—like windmills do—which contrasts with the experimental, interventionist approach in the West. Obviously this has its limitations, but its relevance can be seen in relation to the ecological problems caused by Western technology.

(2) A number of these societies developed specific forms of exploitation by the state, which has been denoted by the term 'despotism'. Some French scholars tend to underrate this aspect. But it is particularly relevant in pre-revolutionary situations in societies where forms of such despotism are still surviving. Marxists who have learned from European experience to look at exploitation in clear-cut categories may overlook the wider scope of revolutionary discontent under such forms of general exploitation by a despotic, arbitrary, uncontrolled state-machinery.

(3) The tenacity of pre-capitalist modes of production has two aspects. Positively, old communal forms may survive for a long time and serve the construction of Socialism where they do so. This may also apply to some qualities of life and human relations which get lost in the fetishism of consumerism and through other consequences of a Capitalist development of the productive forces, qualities which are not so easily recovered in post-Capitalist Socialism. This is what many African Socialists are emphasizing. It would be worthwhile also, to study, to what extent, and whether pre-Capitalist social and cultural traditions helped the Chinese Communists to use successfully moral incentives rather than material ones (though, of course, not exclusively) in the mobilization of the people.

Negatively, the structures and habits of State despotism may survive many, even revolutionary, changes and create

tremendous impediments for Socialist progress. It is the crucial problem of bureaucratism which makes further studies in this direction most relevant.

The next task would be to draw conclusions from this debate with regard to India for which the present author feels he is not sufficiently qualified in the field of Indian history and culture. The only thing he can do is to draw attention to the studies of the Indian Marxists in this area, evaluating them in the light of the above discussion and raising some questions for further consideration.

CHAPTER II

INDIAN MARXISTS ON MARX AND INDIAN HISTORY

Marxism reached India at the time of national struggle for independence. Most Marxists of the first generation were Nationalists before becoming Marxists, and, of course, they did not dissociate themselves from the national cause. One of the dimensions of the national struggle was the striving for national identity through a re-evaluation of Indian history and culture. The Nationalists attempted to overcome the humiliation caused by the British conquest and rule and its justification by the ideology of European superiority. It was the time of the discovery or re-discovery of India. Confronted with the economic and technological advantage of the colonial rulers it was a tempting option to put all emphasis on the unmatched heights of Indian spirituality. Marxists could not, of course, emulate this way of recovering national pride and identity. Most probably many of them were simply attracted by Marxism because it offered an alternative to revivalism, a way of modernization, if not westernization, without the price of submission to Imperialism or compromise with it. Marxism provided the opportunity of analysing critically all the deficiencies of traditional Indian society without becoming supporters of colonial rule. The revolutionary Soviet State in Russia dismissed them from the troubles of finding a historical identity. Their identity as it were, was anchored in the future, represented by the victors of the October Revolution and the world-wide operating Comintern. This international, future-oriented perspective may explain why some Marxists tended to underestimate the relevance of the question of national identity which requires the appropria-

tion of the historical and cultural heritage in the way of a critical evaluation. Marxism itself has an inherent urge to analyse the past and to appropriate what is progressive in it. Marx's observations about Asiatic societies, as they became known, stimulated historical studies in the field of social and economic history as well as in that of philosophy and religion. The verdict of 'stagnation' was in spite of Marx's authority, not readily accepted. Attempts were made to identify progressive trends which were not noted by Marx and to develop a more differentiated picture of Indian history.

A survey of some of the major contributions to the debate on Marx and Indian history may simultaneously give some insight into various trends of Marxist discussion in India.

1. Stalin's Laws of History—Applied and Questioned

Marxism was introduced in India at a time when Marxism was undergoing a process of vulgarisation and dogmatisation under the rising star of Stalin, at least within the realm of the official Communist parties. Creative Marxist thinking like that of Karl Korsch and Walter Benjamin in Germany or, somewhat later, of C. G. Shah in India, had only some impact in marginal intellectual circles. The intellectual communication in the context of the Comintern was dominated by questions of strategy and tactics. The Marxist concept of history was taken for granted as a set of universal laws which could be applied to particular circumstances with minor adaptations. M. N. Roy was a brilliant protagonist of an earlier form of orthodox Marxism in the line of Kautsky and Plekhanov. He revealed his originality as he develops his views in a debate with Lenin about the limits of co-operation with the bourgeoisie. His book *India in Transition*, written in 1921-22 with a view to the policy-debates in the Communist

International, was the first comprehensive analysis of Indian society from a Marxist point of view. Roy claimed that the transition to Capitalism was well underway in India; and that the Indian bourgeoisie could not be trusted any more as a leading force in the struggle for national independence, as it could be expected to compromise soon with the imperialist bourgeoisie against the rising masses. He emphasises again and again, like the Russian Marxists in their debate with the narodniki 30 years earlier, that India was not an exception to the general laws of social evolution, though he recognizes certain modifications.

> The social growth followed almost the same process of evolution as in the savage and barbaric periods in the human society everywhere, only with certain modifications in the superstructure, caused by local circumstances. The physical and climatic conditions told heavily upon the structure of Indian society. Slavery, Feudalism, Serfdom—all took somewhat different forms.[1]

The articles of Marx on India were not yet introduced into the discussion at the time that Roy wrote his book. He observes stagnation as well, but explains it not in terms of a peculiar form of Asiatic society. On the contrary, he sees it as a result of 'colonial Capitalism'. He assumes that India was already on the eve of industrial Capitalism—thanks to its own inner development—as the British came to establish their colonial empire. Arts and crafts were no longer exclusively tied to the isolated villages; the principal industries had been commercialized and were based in flourishing towns; a prosperous class of traders had taken control of production and distribution. Everything was ready for the next step.

> Thus we find that at the time of the British invasion, India stood at the stage of social economics which would

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[1] *India in Transition*, Bombay, 1971, p. 96.

> have been the period of transition of her industry from manufacture to mechanofacture.[2]

That India could not pass from mercantile or commercial Capitalism to industrial Capitalism was due not to internal factors, but to the external factor of policies imposed according to its interests by a foreign bourgeoisie. That the British could so easily impose their rule was due to their superiority over the native bourgeoisie which was politically still very weak in the aftermath of the decline of the Moghul Empire. In such a historial constellation it fell to a foreign bourgeoisie to fulfill the task of destroying or at least undermining Feudalism in India, which was about to decline anyway. As bourgeoisie it represented a progressive force destined to open a new phase in Indian history. But it only partly did so. It introduced rent-yielding property, western education, the concept and some institutions of political nationhood etc. But its main task, the introduction of the Capitalist mode of production, was realized in a negative way only. It destroyed the pre-Capitalist mode of production; it brought India into the orbit of world Capitalism; it introduced Capitalist relations of exploitation; but it failed to introduce the modern techniques of production which are the positive progressive aspect of Capitalism.

> As in the industrial field, so in the agricultural, India has for a long time been reduced to Capitalist exploitation, without receiving the benefits of Capitalist development.[3]

The rural population has been forced to produce for the world market instead of for its own subsistence only. But they did not profit from a modernization of the backward methods of cultivation. Under these conditions the Indian peasantry

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[2] *Ibid*, p. 99.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

suffered from exploitation from two sides, from 'foreign capital in a higher stage of development' and from the 'native capital in a lower stage', i.e. the usury capital of moneylenders, local traders, land speculators and the like.[4]

In the industrial sector the situation was even worse. The traditional craft industries were destroyed. But the development of modern industry which could have absorbed the millions of deprived artisans, who were now forced to take to agriculture, was prevented by the drain of capital in the early phase of the rule of British traders, and later on by the preservation of the monopoly on the Indian market for British industry.[5]

> India is the most remarkable example of how Capitalism, being by its very nature a force of social progress, has nevertheless led to social stagnation, if not retrogression.[6]

Roy ascribes this 'abnormal state of economic progress' to 'colonial Capitalism' and the 'colonial state', thus evolving a concept which comes close to the theory of the development of under-development as nowadays propagated by A. G. Frank and other Latin American Marxists.

> The introduction of higher means of production in cotton manufacture marked an era of social and economic progress in England, but it had a retrograde effect upon India. The forces that helped to build so many industrial centres in the former, were used for the destruction of prosperous towns and urban industrial centres in the latter. The reason of this diametrically opposite effect of the same cause was that India as well as English society came under a more developed method of exploitation, but the improved means of production which made this new method of ex-

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[6] *Ibid*, p. 92.

> ploitation possible, remained the property of the bourgeoisie of one country, which became the political ruler of the other.[7]

The colonial State did not need the same economic foundation as a bourgeois national State.[8] The British bourgeoisie used it to deprive Feudalism from its political power, which was a 'revolutionary act'. But it was against its interests to let the progressive, potential bourgeois elements of Indian society, the native trading class and the intelligentia, develop and come into their own. It allied itself with the former feudal forces, and crushed the native trading class, preventing it from moving into the field of industrial investment. Instead it was diverted into land-speculation and the like.[9] By obstructing the development of the progressive forces in society the colonial state became a 'reactionary force'.[10]

But abnormalcy could not last for ever. The laws of history cannot be circumvented in the long run. Against the end of the 19th century 'the social forces of history broke the bonds of artificial restriction and asserted themselves'.[11] The rise of a national bourgeoisie could no longer be prevented. It has definitely broken the 'social stagnation'.[12] The very point of Roy's book is to show the consequences of the new dynamic forces at work in Indian society. But it was in opposition, at least initially, to the British bourgeoisie that the Indian bourgeoisie brought India back to the normal path of historical development. The British bourgeoisie accomplished the destructive part of the industrial revolution. The Indian bourgeoisie had to rise to start the constructive part of it.[13]

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[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 90f.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 155.
[9] *Ibid*, p. 63.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 157.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

The picture Roy gives differs considerably from that which Marx gave in his articles on India. Marx saw the stagnation caused by pre-British 'Asiatic' society and broken up by the dynamics introduced by Western conquest. Roy sees the normal development towards industrial Capitalism thwarted by the intrusion of a more advanced and politically more powerful industrial bourgeoisie. For him it is colonial Capitalism which causes the stagnation. He emphasises that the backwardness of the Indian economy—at the beginning of the 20th Century—should not be ascribed to the 'conservatism' of the people or to the 'shyness of native capital' as held by Imperialist historians. Its conservatism is not due 'to some peculiar characteristics of theirs' but to the prevention of the introduction of modern machinery. The lack of industrial enterprise is not a matter of 'any instinctive aversion' of the wealthy class, but of the 'abnormal political condition of the country' under colonial rule.[14]

He holds as well a different view of the relation of countryside and towns in pre-British India. He does not deny that the Indian village used to be a 'self-contained economic unit', but sees this as a trait common to 'all the industrially backward countries'. The hereditary division of labour as stereotyped into the caste system was also not too different from patterns elsewhere, especially not in the commercial and manufacturing epoch, before the arrival of the British, as it developed 'into trade and craft guilds resembling greatly their prototype in contemporary Europe'.[15] He shares the negative view of rural life in isolation.[16] But he holds—rightly—that there were flourishing towns, centres of manufacture and trade, at the time of British invasion, which were destroyed

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[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 89f..
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 96.
[16] *cf. ibid.*, p. 128.

under colonial rule, a process that forced a huge percentage of the town population back to the countryside, the opposite of what happened in Europe under bourgeois rule.[17] What unites Marx—and Lenin—and Roy is that all are radical Westernizers. Roy is not tempted to draw inspiration or even guidance for the national struggle from the past and its cultural heritage (cf. below for his criticism of Gandhi). But he claims the same potential of development for India under normal conditions and offers another picture of its history. Later concepts will move between those two poles, of Marx and Roy, not necessarily in the sense of exegetical schools, but in the sense of differing views on the basic factors at work in the history of Indian society.

S. A. Dange gives the most exposed example of a straight and unrestricted application of the universal laws as conceived by Stalin to Indian history, in his book, *India from Primitive Communism to Slavery*.[18] For the present purpose it is sufficient to look at his method and presuppositions, without going into the details of his study.

Dange bases himself on Engels' book, *The Origin of the Family Private Property and the State* and tries to find evidence for the same stages of development of human society in Indian history. He does not use archaeological material but limits himself to the interpretation of ancient scriptures, especially the Vedas and the Mahabharata, trying to make them disclose—in spite of their mythological language—information about the realities of social and economic life which they ultimately reflect. Thus, he describes the stage of primitive Communism of the Aryan commune, its collective mode of

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[17] *Cf. ibid*, pp. 46f. p. 55.

[18] People's Publishing House, Bombay, 1949, 1972, Fifth Edition.

production and its pattern of commune marriage, followed by the rise of *varnas*, private property and classes, leading to the establishment of monarchical slave states, which were finally weakened in the Mahabharata war. Dange's theory of slavery in Indian history is of special interest. He assumes, that the first three *varnas* sprang from the same origin of primitive homogeneous society in the process of increasing division of labour, whereas the *varna* of the *sudra* simultaneously developed from the utilisation of war prisoners as slaves.

In his preface to the third edition (1954) Dange discusses some questions raised by his propositions. He admits more clearly that slavery in ancient India was predominantly of a domestic type, differing from the 'labour slavery' of Greece and Rome.

> This intertwining of the household community with domestic slavery and its existence over a long period without slavery supplanting other forms is a *specific feature of Indian slavery*.[19]

The transition from slavery to Feudalism happens, according to Dange, in the process of the *varnas* being replaced by castes in the context of the newly emerging village community which replaces the old organisation of the household community.

> The village community with the caste system is the basis of the structure of Indian Feudalism.[20]

Dange deals also with Marx's references to the unchanging village communities of India. He does not touch the question of Asiatic mode of production, which was no point of discussion at the time of writing.[21] He tries to interpret

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[19] *Ibid.*, p. xii.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. xii.
[21] *Cf.* his quotation from the History of the CPSU which omits Marx's reference to the Asiatic mode, p. 14.

Marx in accordance with the later schemes of Engels. He finds that, ' these references of Marx have been interpreted in a mechanical and dogmatic way' and that, therefore, discussion is necessary.[22] In fact, he silently passes over Marx's observations regarding the unity of agriculture and manufacture, assuming their separation along with the separation of town and countryside.[23] He distinguishes with the 1891 edition of Engels' book, three different (and subsequent) types of village communities.

> The village community which Marx speaks of is of the third type. It did not exist in the period of primitive Communism where there was no *varna* or caste. It did not exist in the early days of the rise of classes, *varna* and slavery. It arose only on the fall of the latter and became a caste-community village of Indian Feudalism.[24]

Dange further opposes the contention, derived from Marx's description of the self-sufficient village communities and their stagnation, that there were no internal class-contradictions. Marx was not giving an 'all-sided treatment of the subject'. The aspect of class-struggle still remains to be studied.

> It would be a denial of Marxism itself if one were to say that during these two thousand years these communities developed no inner contradictions, developed no antagonism and struggle within themselves or had no struggle with the feudal state that ruled over them.[25]

Dange does not go into the question why these contradictions did not lead to a bourgeois development.[26]

From these short notes it can be seen that Dange strictly follows the unilinear scheme and does not allow Indian history to show basic deviations from it. In an introductory

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[22] *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
[23] *Cf. ibid.*, p. 131.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. xvii.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. xix.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

chapter on ' Contemporary lines of studies in Indian history ', he gives political reasons for this approach. Indian nationalism developed a militant history writing as a weapon against the demoralising use of history by the British rulers against the freedom movement. Writers of history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries based the claim for independence on India's age, lineage, ancient capacities, wisdom etc. But in a next stage the Indian bourgeoisie started also to exploit the unique features of Indian culture against the rising Communist movement, arguing that whatever the case in Europe and elsewhere ' India and its culture, its people and history were so peculiar that they did not answer to any of the laws of Marxism-Leninism.' They said, instead ' we shall have a new product of our own—Gandhian Socialism, and belie your law of Communism, of your historical materialism, in the future, as the special destiny of India belied it in the past.' [27] Against this Dange wants to prove ' that the law of historical materialism, the law that productive forces and production relations determine man's history through the ages, is valid for India too, for the past, the present and the future.' [28]

Dange is, of course, right in pointing at the political function of a certain type of glorification of the past, of Indian culture and spirituality. But the question at stake is not whether historical materialism is valid for India also, i.e. the assumption that productive forces and production relations determine man's history—no Marxist would deny that—but whether this determination leads to the same formations of society in the same successive order everywhere, so that Indian society of necessity must have gone through the same formations as, for instance, European society. By not taking into consider-

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[27] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

ation the possibility of different developments in a historical materialistic understanding of history Dange leaves it to the nationalists and spiritualists to claim specific and unique elements of Indian history and culture, instead of enriching Marxist writing by an evaluation of new historical material which was not yet considered by Engels and others (though he suffered, of course, from severe limitations since he was writing in prison).

A. R. Desai in his book *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*[29] applies also the 'method of historical materialism'.[30] This study was written in 1946, whereas some notes referring to Marx have been added, it seems, in a later edition. He assumes that *generally* communities live through tribal, slave and feudal phases of social existence. He does not deviate formally from the usual scheme but his emphasis is more on historical conditions which make that every nation is born in a unique way.

> Pre-British India had a social structure quite unique and perhaps without a parallel in history. It sharply differed in its economic base from the pre-Capitalist medieval societies of European countries.[31]

He mentions the religious and cultural diversity, the atomization in castes, and the strong self-preservative will of past social, economic and cultural structures. He qualifies pre-British India as an Asiatic variety of Feudalism.

> Pre-British Indian economy was the Asiatic variety of feudal economy with certain unique features distinguishing it from European feudal economy. It was based on absence of private property in land, village possession of land, village autarchy based on unity of industry and agri-

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[29] Bombay, 1964, Fourth Edition.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. xi.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

culture, and irrigation and other public works as the concern of the State. According to Marx, these traits determined the life history and development (or rather lack of development, relative stationariness) of pre-British Indian society.[32]

D. D. Kosambi's study, '*The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*'[33] is of great value in the context of the present discussion. He provides a materialist interpretation of Indian history and culture without imposing a rigid preconceived universal scheme of successive stages. His findings are based not only on the interpretation of texts (as in Dange's case) but on archaeological material and anthropological studies of still surviving tribal patterns of life as well. His approach is Marxist, as his definition of history clearly indicates :

> History is the presentation in chronological order of successive changes in the means and relations of production.[34]

Interpreting the story of India's past in these terms, showing that such changes took place, Kosambi is able to refute the assumption of Marx that India has had no history in that sense. At the same time he avoids any mechanical economic determinism which assumes a rigid pattern of historical development. This will not do, 'particularly in dealing with India, where form is given the utmost importance while content is ignored'.[35] He also gives examples from other parts of the world to underline this point :

> At every stage the survival of previous forms and the ideology of the top classes exert tremendous force—whether by tradition or revolt against tradition—upon any social movement.[36]

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[32] Note, p. 32.
[33] Delhi, 1972, Second Edition.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

After reciting the order of ' primitive Communism, the patriarchal (Abraham in the Old Testament) and/or the Asiatic mode (undefined), the slave society of classical Greece and Rome, Feudalism, the bourgeois mode; and for some countries Socialism ' Kosambi makes two points why Indian history ' does not fit precisely into this rigid framework ' :

1. At every stage, in almost every part of the country, a great deal of the superstructure survived, along with the productive and formal mechanism of several previous stages.
2. It is impossible to find slavery in the classical European sense in India at any period.[37]

Kosambi does not use the concept of the Asiatic mode of production, which he qualifies here as ' undefined '.[38] He sketches instead a development from ' primitive life and prehistory ' towards a pre-feudal form of class-society before moving towards Feudalism. The picture he gives is that of a steady progress up to Asoka and the culmination of the Magadhan Empire, followed by a slow decline, due to the paralysing impact of brahminism and the increasing dominance of the system of self-sustaining villages, a decline from which India did not recover until modern times.

Kosambi is responsible for a basic breakthrough in the Marxist study of Indian history. Other authors could be quoted to show that an increasing number of Marxist historians refuse to maintain a rigid scheme of universal laws which hinders them in adequately analysing the rich historical material, allowing it to reveal other patterns of socio-economic and political organization than has been conceived in this

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[37] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[38] Some reflections on this topic which he seems to have published elsewhere could not be consulted.

scheme. This is in tune with the trend in Marxist historical studies all over the world, which has been discussed earlier. It can be evaluated as the result of the changing political landscape in world politics as well as in World Communism on the one hand, and as the result of a broadening and deepening impact of Marxism in intellectual circles beyond the party membership and its repercussions on intellectuals within the party, on the other hand. As always, a tension remains between the theoretical freedom which the intellectual quest for truth requires and the simplifications which party-ideologues are looking for in their job of training cadres and maintaining a common ideological discipline. Stalin wielded so much influence over the minds of Communist cadres all around the world not only because of his tremendous political power, but also because he utilized to the utmost the attractive power of simplified doctrines and handy schemes which do not leave room for doubts or questions. After his death the party-ideologues did not want to give up this instrument of discipline and power. That is one of the reasons why the process of de-stalinization was only a partial one. Stalin was criticized for certain mistakes, but no radical break was made with the practices which made those mistakes possible. One of the consequences was that Marxism as an instrument of critical analysis remained fettered to a large extent by the considerations of party-discipline.

Susobhan Sarkar provides an interesting example of an attempt to integrate newly gained insights into a more traditional framework so that they do not disorientate or confuse the party-cadres too much. In his contribution to *Das Kapital Centenary Volume*,[39] which has the title 'The Historical Approach in Marx' he deals with the question of historical stages, Asiatic mode of production etc. He recognises

[39] PPH, 1968.

the need for popularization but regrets that 'no indication is usually given that Marx's own thought was more complex, and more historical than this'. And he adds: 'It will be a misfortune if Marx's genuine intellectual quest is allowed to be forgotten. Marxism surely cannot ignore Marx himself'. In his own book, *A Marxian Glimpse of History*[40] based on an earlier Bengali edition, he explicitly apologizes in his Preface for 'oversimplification', saying that it is meant for 'Communist cadres' and 'not for the world of scholarship'. With this reservation he falls back upon Stalin's explanation of the materialist conception of history:

> His remarks, perhaps, are too simple and in parts even somewhat misleading. In the absence of any clear alternative however his presentation may still be followed in preliminary studies. Only, we have to remember that the materialist conception of history cannot be mastered in such an easy fashion. It requires, on the other hand, deep analysis and wide discussion. That, of course, is out of the question in an elementary essay like this.[41]

Meanwhile Sarkar moves very cautiously. He silently changes the picture of the framework by discussing Asiatic society along with slave society and Feudalism and by reducing the basic scheme to 'the motion from the primitive classless pre-civilized society to civilized class societies, and from the latter towards the modern classless civilized society now in the making'.[42] This is really an attempt to reflect the recent debate but, unfortunately, he does not indicate why he presents the picture in this way. He neither explains how far there is a difference with former teaching, nor does he raise questions about different ways to Socialism resulting from

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[40] PPH, 1975.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 112.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

different historical conditions. Tensions and problems involved are not made conscious to the readers. An impression of serene, unchallenged truth is conveyed. There may be minor open questions but basically that does not matter. Of course, Sarkar cannot go into all sorts of details. The problem is that he does not—not yet ?—want or dare to create a different consciousness of truth, a different, critical-historical relation to doctrine. So far even Sarkar does not break with Stalinism. This is confirmed in his comments about Stalin, who receives praise, a.o., for the 'assembly of millions of peasants in collective agriculture',[43] whereas he is criticized only in a vague general manner for being 'unduly severe.[44] The policies themselves are presented as being in tune with the lawful course of history. This amounts to inviting Communist cadres in India not to worry about future policies for the construction of Socialism; not to analyse the mistakes of the past. Basically there are no dilemmas.

In other words, it seems there is still a long way to go before the return to Marx will strengthen the organized Communist movement in such a way that it more effectively and creatively prepares for facing the complex problems of different historical situations.

2. Marx's Insights—Used and Corrected

Marx's views on Indian history and the character of its society were introduced into the discussion by the end of the thirties. Palme Dutt and Shelvankar are the first to employ his writings on India and the Asiatic mode of production—with the exception of *Grundrisse*—in their studies. The starting point is once more the assumption of a universal pattern

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[43] *Ibid.*, p. 137f.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

of development. Shelvankar in his book, *The Problem of India*[45] utilizes the concept of the Asiatic mode of production for explaining why India did not follow the same development as Europe, passing from Feudalism to Capitalism. What is called 'Indian Feudalism' differed basically from Feudalism in Europe. It did not know the manorial system which created the dynamic factor of direct conflicts between the manorial lord and the peasantry. In India there were only conflicts between overlords of various grades ' for the right or power to get a payment from the peasant, not to seize his land '.[46] The equilibrium of the village community remained unaffected by these conflicts. The further crucial factor is the ' essential difference in the interrelations which prevailed in Europe and India between the State, town and country'.[47] In India the State was bound up with the land through the necessity of irrigation works etc.—and could not allow the towns and thus the bourgeoisie to develop an independent economic role. The bourgeoisie could not turn the countryside into its market and had to ' resign itself to playing a subordinate role to the courts and noblemen '.[48]

For these reasons—the invincible toughness of the village and the political impotence of the bourgeoisie—the evolution of Indian economy was inhibited and the spontaneous emergence of a Capitalist order was rendered impossible.[49]

At the end of his book Shelvankar identifies this system, based on the village and the State, as the Asiatic mode of production which Marx sharply distinguished from antiquity and European Feudalism.

It was, in fact, an economic system to which the West affords no parallel. Its uniqueness is revealed in its in-

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[45] Penguin Special, 1940, 1943.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 110f.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

> capacity to transcend itself. It was condemned to immortality ; from century to century its essential identity with itself was scarcily impaired. Hence, whatever the superficial resemblances it may have displayed to the condition of Europe in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was not in like process of transformation. Least of all was it in the throes of producing Capitalism.[50]

This was a systematic elaboration and application of Marx's insights, without reservations. Though Shelvankar recognized certain limited evolutions in sub-division of labour and large-scale production, in the widening of interdependence of the villages through commodity exchange, and in the development of merchant capital, he did not weaken the final verdict on the line of Marx :

> Its uniqueness is revealed in its incapacity to transcend itself.

This turned out to be an extreme position which did not find unreserved support from other Indian Marxists in further contributions to the debate. One reason is, of course, that such a position could not be popular at the time of national struggle for independence. But there is also the reason of Marxist theory which urges to look for inner contradictions as factors of historical development. Would India be an exception to that? Historical reasons were sought and found to question that assumption.

R. Palme Dutt's *India Today*, the only comprehensive study on India for generations of Indian Marxists, did not go deeply into the problem.[51] He does not challenge or question Marx, but he quietly makes his reservations. He refers to the 'Asiatic economy', and welcomes with Marx—and

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[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 129f.

[51] Dutt wrote this study in the years 1936-39 ; quotations are from the reprint, Calcutta, 1970.

Roy—the destructive role of the British conquest as necessary. But he differs from Marx—and comes closer to Roy without mentioning him, when he states :

> It does not necessarily follow from this that such a destruction would have been impossible without the British conquest. On the contrary, there is some reason to judge that the traditional Indian society in decomposition at the moment of the British conquest was trembling on the verge of the first stage of the bourgeois revolution on the basis of its own resources.[52]

Other authors who differ from Marx in this point discuss also his authority. One can speak of a respectful distance to Marx. The general trend is nowadays to admit that Marx's views regarding pre-British India cannot be upheld in face of the historical material which since his days has been collected and evaluated. But one follows him by using his method in analysing the material and trying to come to a new understanding of Indian history and society. Professor Irfan Habib of Aligarh University, one of the leading figures in the recent debate, argues as well on the ideological as on the historical level. He says that the acceptance of an Asiatic mode of production, characterised by unchangeableness, would make the majority of mankind an exception to the materialist conception of history. The restoration of that theory by western Marxists, has in his eyes, the purpose

> to deny the role of class-contradictions and class struggles in Asian societies and to emphasise the existence of the authoritarian and anti-individualistic traditions in Asia, so as to establish that the entire past history of social progress belongs to Europe alone, and thereby to belittle the revolutionary lessons to be drawn from the recent history of Asia.[53]

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[52] *Ibid.*, p. 304.

[53] 'Problems of Marxist Historical Analysis' in; *India—State and Society. A Marxist Approach*, Ed. by K. Mathew Kurian, Orient Longman, 1975, p. 28.

It is true that the recent discussions in Western Europe so far do not focus so much on the role of class-contradictions in Asiatic societies. But it is a misunderstanding to assume that the purpose of the debate is ' to establish that the entire past history of social progress belongs to Europe alone '. This can be said to be the trend of some contributions like that of Tökei, but it cannot be said to be the essence of the debate as such. On the contrary, the main purpose is to stop imposing European categories by freeing Marxism from the strait-jacket of the scheme, Primitive Communism—Slavery—Fedualism—Capitalism which Habib himself so vigorously and convincingly rejects. In his words :

> We must, therefore, reject as unhistorical (and undialectical) the assumption that every society at the highest stage of development would inevitably—of itself—reach the next higher stage. In fact, we should look rather for alternating progress and recession in the evolution of each society, in relation to the general advance on the world scale.[54]

This is exactly what the debate is about. The assumption of ' unchangeableness' has either been rejected or interpreted in such a way that it is no longer seen as a unique characteristic of Asiatic society only. So far the refutation of the stagnation-charge has mainly been given in terms of the technological and cultural progress achieved by Asiatic Societies—something which Habib is also asking for—and not so much in terms of social progress as achieved by class struggle. Habib's proposal to focus more on that, for instance, by the study of peasant revolts can strongly be welcomed. But for that he doesn't need to make a violent attack against the whole debate on the Asiatic mode of production. The limitations of the concept have become clear, but its rediscovery has been a step on the way to a deeper understanding of history from a Marxist perspective.

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[54] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Habib does not argue only on the base of the general postulate that change must have taken place everywhere and thus in pre-British India too. As a historian he also collected and evaluated rich material about Mughal India, showing that the reality of that time differed from Marx's picture.[55]

Some authors had claimed that ' left to herself India (as other under-developed countries) would have, in due course, followed the path of industrialisation, with all its implications '.[56]

This approach follows the line of nationalist writers like Romesh Chandra Dutt by referring to the wealth and the high level of manufacture, trade, banking etc. in pre-British India. The same line can be discerned in recent Soviet publications, whose authors work on the assumption that the history of Indian society fits into the general scheme of slavery and Feudalism.

Irfan Habib is much more cautious. He rejects the scheme and shows that whatever similarities with European Feudalism may be found in India prior to 1200 A.D. they certainly have disappeared afterwards. The structure of Mughal India is different altogether. Its essential elements are : ' considerable stratification within the peasantry ; a superior rural class (the zamindars) holding property rights over a relatively minor share in the peasants ' surplus ; the bulk of the surplus collected as land revenue, extensively in cash ; the distribution of revenue resources among a small ruling class formed by the king's officials (*jagirdars*). The principal contradiction therefore, lay between the king's bureaucracy and the peasantry'.[57] It does not make sense, he argues, to treat this as part

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[55] See his book *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, Oxford 1965 and articles in several journals.

[56] V. B. Singh, in *Indian Economy and Today*, PPH, 1964, p. 7.

[57] Habib, *Problems of Marxist Historical Analysis*, p. 29f.

of the same epoch as the so-called feudal society of the earlier milennium. At the same time, he warns against drawing quick conclusions from the existence of a large urban market and extensive commodity production that Capitalist conditions were maturing within this society, as suggested by Singh and others.

He tries to analyse Mughal India on its own terms, and leaves open the question whether Capitalism would have developed in due course.

> By and large, it has appeared that while some factors, such as political environment and caste, were not as effective in checking commercial expansion as has sometimes been thought, any element actively generating Capitalistic growth are also not met with.[58]

Habib is inclined to think that the changes which occurred, namely, the subversion of peasant agriculture, and the concomitant economic crisis, did not directly lead to a semi-Capitalist form of agriculture, but that this economic crisis " transformed itself into a political crisis, marked by agrarian uprisings often under zamindar leaderships, and in the end, bringing about the collapse of the Mughal Empire and, with it, the weakening of several aspects of the economic and social structure that it had sustained '.[59]

The inadequacy of Marx's picture has also been shown by an analysis of the sources he relied upon. S. Naqvi, who scrutinizes partly these sources, finds them of secondary quality. This is due of course, to the lack of better material, but even in Marx's lifetime better information was available. It could have revealed to Marx that private property

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[58] ' Potentialities of Change in the Economy of Mughal India ' in : *Socialist Digest* No. 6, Sept. 72, p. 121.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

was not absent; that the cities had more functions than he assumed; that there was no such general dependence on central state power for irrigation; that there was commodity production and trade; and that a class of craftsmen and labourers without land of their own existed; in fact, all the features which would have changed his picture of Asian society. Naqvi concludes that further probes into the available material are necessary, ' in order to reconstruct the pattern or patterns of social formations in different parts of India, during different periods and on such a realistic basis re-examine the sequence of economic (including technological) development in India and their corresponding institutional framework, along with any reversals that may have occurred in the process '...[60]

The participants in the discussion choose different ways in reconciling their criticism of Marx with their respect for him. Irfan Habib mitigates his differences with Marx by assuming that Marx at a later stage abandoned or reconsidered his concept. But Naqvi and others exclude this possibility. The evidence seems to be on their side.[61] V. B. Singh tries to bring out, by careful analysis of one of the relevant texts, that Marx's statements on the village communities do not imply an absolute verdict on the ' unchangeableness of Asiatic societies '. This phrase he used ' only in a relative sense '. Of special interest are the remarks of P. C. Joshi and E. M. S. Namboodiripad. Both pay due respect to Marx but advocate an independent scrutiny of the material relating to India's past. P. C. Joshi distinguishes between the meaning of the fact that Marx studied Asiatic society on its own terms and his actual findings which need to be re-examined. He sees

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[60] ' Marx on Pre-British Indian Society and Economy ' in : *Socialist Digest* No. 7, March 1973, p. 67.

[61] *cf.* Naqvi, *ibid.*, p. 46f.

in Marx's writings on India an example ' how to apply creatively the historical materialist approach to the study of a non-western society ' and explains what he means by ' creatively ' as he continues :

> While studying a pre-industrial, Asiatic society, Marx does not try to fit the facts of this society into a ready-made framework derived from the study of a western, Capitalist society. On the contrary, he is constantly looking for the specificities of Asiatic societies, though without adopting the standpoint of Asiatic ' exceptionalism '.[62]

Regarding Marx's findings Joshi considers his ' overall view of the Indian society and the future course of its evolution under the impact of British rule ' of ' enduring value '.

> Marx's ideas have a great potentiality in this search for a new road of development. At the same time this potentiality of Marxism can be fully harnessed only by discriminating between the universal and the specific in the Marxian heritage. The bold rejection of those Marxian formulations which are time-and-region-bound is the first step in this direction.[63]

E. M. S. Nampoodiripad distinguishes between the use of guidelines provided by Marxism and the mechanical application of its theory, which he rejects. In a review of the Hobsbawm edition, *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations by Karl Marx*, he states that any mechanical approach is made impossible by these notes of Marx. Marx analyses the conditions under which Indian society was being subordinated to Capitalism. This cannot be used for an analysis of Asian society in general.

> Marxism after all is not the ' Open Sesame ' for all problems of scientific analysis. It is only the guideline for that

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[62] ' Marx and the Agrarian problem in India ' in : *Homage to Karl Marx*. A Symposium, ed. by P. C. Joshi, PPH 1959, p. 183.
[63] *Ibid.*, p. 189f.

> research, for the collection and analysis of factual data, for drawing provisional conclusions, for the further verification of these provisional conclusions by the collection of more data and so on, which is indispensable to any scholar.[64]

Marx's notes bring at least four variants of forms into which primitive communal society could dissolve. Repeating formulae of Slavery-Feudalism-Capitalism or Asiatic society-Capitalism, therefore, ' cannot be a substitute for the painstaking study of factual data which is obligatory for any Marxist student of Indian history '.[65]

One of the questions to be studied is why this 'long and stubborn survival' took place in India. E. M. S. suggests that Marx's hint at the role of caste is worth deeper study.

Susobhan Sarkar, in his contribution ' Marx on Indian History ', emphasises that Marx did not arrive at a final conclusion regarding the concept of Asiatic society, and that the picture at least was ' much more complex and less durable than Marx imagined'.[66] He points out that Marx in his notes stresses no longer so much the absence of property in land and Asiatic despotism, based on the necessity of public works, but focuses mainly on the 'self-sustaining unity of manufacture and agriculture'. At the same time he rejects the suggestion that Marx repudiated the concept of Asiatic society. Instead, he ascribes to Engels a 'popular simplification' which left out the complications caused by this concept. For further study this simplification cannot be accepted.

Marx's concept is most important in the sense that it draws

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[64] ' Marx, The Asiatic Mode and the Study of Indian History ' in : *The Radical Review*, Madras, Vol. 3 No. 2. (Apr.-Jun. 1972) p. 27.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[66] *Homage to Karl Marx*, p. 95.

attention to the special conditions in the East and helps to dissolve the facile idea of a unilinear historical evolution all over the world of a somewhat Hegelian pattern.[67]

N. Ram, whose major concern seems to be to prove beyond any doubt that he is a 'firm believer in Marxism alone', makes a rather strong plea for the value of the concept of the Asiatic mode of production as a tool of analysis.[68]

> Contrary to the contention of some historians, nowhere is the theoretical-conceptual value of this method more clearly seen than in the study of Asiatic societies . . . It is particularly with reference to India that the originality and brilliance of Marx's theory comes to the fore.[69]

Ram solves the problem of 'unchangeableness' by speaking about the 'relatively "unchanging" character of the Asiatic mode.' And finally :

> Any attempt to read into this analysis a puzzling 'exemption' from the laws of development that Marx discovered is to miss the whole point of the complex and highly dialectical method of Marx and Engels and to lapse into a mechanical understanding.[70]

The report of a work group 'on Indian heritage' at the First Conference of the Indian School of Social Sciences on 'Marxian Approach to Research in Social Sciences' tries to do justice to all aspects which play a role in the debate and wants to encourage further study of these questions.[71]

In summary it appears that Marx's writings about India and the Asiatic mode of production have had a fruitful effect.

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[67] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[68] See 'Impact of Early Colonisation on Economy of South India' in : *Social Scientist* 4, Nov. 1972, p. 47-65.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[71] *Souvenir of the Conference*, p. 79f.

His negative assessment provoked deeper studies of Indian history by Marxist scholars. The deficiencies in his historical conclusions promoted a sound scientific distinction between the value of Marx's method and the limitations of his actual findings. On the whole, the way has been opened for creative studies of Indian history from a Marxist perspective. The interest so far centres especially around the village community, the character and potential of Mughal India, the stagnation after the British conquest and the role of religion and philosophy in the course of Indian history. The next section reviews some of the discussions without any claim to completeness or competence in deciding historical questions in those fields.

3. Some aspects of Indian history

a. History and character of the village community

The study of Kosambi is of special interest in the context of the present discussion, because he gives a historical dimension to the phenomenon of the self-sufficient, apathetic village. What seemed to be a permanent characteristic and basis of unchanging Asiatic society in the eyes of Marx, is a product of particular historical changes in the analysis of Kosambi. He sees the stagnation of Indian society which he describes in similar terms as Marx did[72] in a historical perspective. Thus, he separates the verdict of stagnation from any association with European prejudices.

Kosambi starts with analysing the Indus culture of the third millennium and its cities, whose existence was unknown in Marx's days. He relates the lack of great changes as will be

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[72] *Culture and Civilization of Ancient India, pp.* 16*ff.*

seen later, to the dominating role of religion. Much more dynamic is the development which begins with the Aryan invasion, which demolished the

> barriers between the small, closed and often decaying peasant communities that characterised the third millennium, away from the great riparian civilisations.[73]

The old isolation in small farming units and closed tribal communities was thereafter impossible. Techniques which had been closely guarded local secrets, often bound up with senseless ritual, became general knowledge. Aryans and pre-Aryans combined as a rule into new communities, by re-grouping, often with a new, Aryan language.[74]

Slowly cities come into being again, along the rivers, during the first quarter of the first millennium. This ' urban revival', as Kosambi calls it, was obviously related to the development of trade, and not so much to the public works that play such a role in the discussion on the Asiatic mode of production. The second quarter sees a ' move towards a universal government for all society ', based on the new needs of the same traders and farmers, to whom the new religious teachings of the 6th century, described below, addressed themselves.

The political theory which became powerful in the Magadha Empire, which is contained in the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya, gives the guidelines for the rule of a dictatorial absolute monarchy. It is near at hand to identify this with an expression of the famous ' oriental despotism ' which again is so prominent in the discussion on Asiatic society. But Kosambi warns against such a historical judgment, saying that at that time it was ' an innovation to suit the formation of a completely new social stage '. This should not be con-

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[73] *Ibid.*, p. 76.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

fused with the ' medieval " oriental despotism " ' that can be characterised as systems in which changes at the top did not affect the social basis, which had long been crystallised.[75] Of course, it could as well be argued the other way around—on the line of the French Marxists—making the concept of Asiatic society more historical and dynamic by including this example of innovating despotism.

Kosambi shows that under the Magadha Kingdom commodity production and trade were highly developed. Whole villages had specialised in certain professions and were organised like guilds.[76]

> The society of the day was still very far from being the caste-ridden, helpless, apathetic village-covered aggregate into which it would evolve within a dozen centuries.[77]

The role of the State became crucial for those later developments. It was a bureaucratic state which controlled everything from industry to agriculture with a huge army, a network of spies and a highly sophisticated administration. It was ruthless in its intervention with traditional patterns. In the field of agricultural production it expanded its power by clearing the jungle, bringing all wasteland under the plough, and bursting the barriers of tribal privileges etc.

Kosambi distinguishes a double pattern of land-administration which he considers to be the key to the understanding of the process which led to the stagnation of village India. On the one hand there were *rāshtra* lands, former tribal settlements, administered along traditional lines, mostly centred around small towns, and paying their traditional taxes to the new State. The *sitā* lands, on the other hand,

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[75] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 125.
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

were settled and farmed directly under crown supervision. They soon formed such a huge proportion that Greek visitors could get the impression that all land belonged to the Indian king. The settlers, immigrants or deported *sudra* families, ' were not slaves, not even serfs, but free settlers—with restrictions on such freedom of action as might cause fiscal losses.'[78] The taxes were much heavier. The land was assigned only for life to the holder. There was obligatory communal labour, but no workers' associations or trade guilds were allowed. The new religious preachers were not permitted to enter into these crown villages. And no peasant could leave them. Such restrictions paved the way to the sort of stagnation that came to play such a crucial role in the analysis of rural India.

> Actually, the idiocy of village life was deliberately fostered by early State policy. Not only did the apathetic village survive the form of State that created it but it destroyed that state and left an ineradicable mark upon the country.

The famous self-sufficiency of the villages, based on the unity of agriculture and manufacture, was also the product of a long historical process, and not just a feature of the changeless East. The same *Arthasastra* State developed a sophisticated economy of commodity production, based on the work of free artisans, organised in powerful guilds, and an elaborate trade-system which brought a ' cash economy into every corner of civic life ', but in the cities and towns only, leaving the majority of the people outside of this process of exchange.[79] The guilds were unable to meet the growing demand for village essentials, due to the steadily increasing number of village settlements, on the one hand, and the limits for large scale commodity production, set by the

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[78] *Ibid.*, p. 149.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

transport problem and the shortage of silver coinage, on the other hand.[80] This encouraged the trend to self-sufficiency of the village, based on the system of village artisans, a process that was completed in the Gupta period. It led in its turn to the decline of the guilds and cities as can be seen from the fate of the city of Patna, and to the unshakable insularity of the village.

Kosambi ascribes an important role to brahminism in the process of ossification and increasing cultural desolation of the village. In the course of the Asokan reform the Brahmin caste had been more and more freed from tribal bonds and traditional *vedic* ritual. It got involved in the acculturation process which brought about the unity of Indian society with all its diverse and even discordant elements. The brahmins penetrated whatever tribes and guild castes remained, assimilating their deities and introducing the plough and the class structure of larger agrarian society by turning the tribes into new peasant *jati* caste groups, saving at the same time much of the former customs. This assimilation process took place with a minimum use of violence, which meant the survival of retarding and regressive elements.

> But the very manner in which the development took place inhibited growth of commodity production and hence of culture beyond a certain level. The emphasis upon superstition meant an incredible proliferation of senseless ritual.[81]

In the same context Kosambi makes brahminism, its style of education and its respect for tradition, responsible for lasting damage to the progress of Indian science. And it is again the isolated village and its 'idiocy' which preserves and even strengthens this sort of religion which inhibits progress of exchange of things, i.e., commodity production.

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[80] *Ibid.*, p. 194.

[81] *Ibid.*, pp. 172f.

Another interesting contribution comes from E. M. S. Namboodiripad who in spite of his deep involvement in practical politics, in an admirable way manages to continue theoretical work as well. In his book, *Kerala Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*[82], he poses the question how the Asiatic society as conceived by Marx evolved, as Marx himself was unable to answer that question. The basic difference with the historical pattern in Europe lies in the fact that primitive Communism in India was not replaced by a class society based on slavery, but by a system which divided society into castes.

> The inequality, oppression and exploitation which were characteristic of *class division* in the Europe of Slavery and Feudalism were in India the result of *caste division*. The growth of civilisation, the ever-expanding fields of social, economic and intellectual activity, the consequent division of society into various professions . . .all this led in India to the multiplication of castes and sub-castes. In Europe, on the other hand, they led to the ascendency and decline of successive social systems—Slavery and Feudalism, and then to the growth of a third—Capitalism. India's caste division was thus the form behind which were concealed all the social revolutions made in Europe by the emergence of Slavery, Feudalism and Capitalism.[83]

Only as Capitalism was established did the social organisation based on castes and sub-castes begin to lag behind. That is where the historical mission of modern Capitalism, as seen by Marx, comes in. Though also E.M.S. admits :

> Unfortunately, however, that mission was not completed either by the British, or the Indian bourgeoisie who followed them.[84]

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[82] Calcutta, 1968.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 26f.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

E. M. S.'s approach combines several aspects and can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the views of Marx, the new historical insights, and the refutation of the charge of permanent stagnation. He seems to identify the Asiatic mode of production with the social organisation based on caste-division, which integrated some of the elements which led to the formations of slavery and Feudalism elsewhere. He acknowledges Marx's point that the village community basically did not alter in the course of time. Nevertheless, changes and developments took place. There was a similar growth of civilisation, socially, economically, and intellectually. He solves the contradiction by saying that the caste-system was able to absorb this growth through the multiplication of castes and sub-castes. The caste-system thus combines the dynamics of class-society—'in essence a class division'—and the unchanging façade of stagnation—the form which conceals the revolutions of Europe.

After his general introduction E. M. S. focuses on the history of Kerala. This is of interest also, as he identifies peculiarities of the social development in Kerala, which led to a historical pattern that differs from the pattern in other parts of India. Discussing the development of family and the existence of land property—the absence of which was (at least at a certain stage) the key to Oriental society for Marx and Engels—he reaches the conclusion :

> It was the operation of internal forces within Kerala and not any intervention from outside, that led to the development of a system that is unique in a country developing along the lines of an Asiatic Society.[85]

Pointing at such a ' unique ' development in a country whose development as an Asiatic society is again 'unique'

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[85] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

in relation to the universal historical schemes of some Marxists, E. M. S. focuses attention on the fact that further detailed historical study may bring to light more and more differences and deviations from a general pattern. This leads to the question of Marxism as a method of analysis and/or as a model, a question which plays an important role in the most recent discussions. Before going into these debates which are related to the more recent history some references should be made to the growing interest which Indian Marxists pay to the cultural heritage, its functions in Indian history and its potentialities in the present struggles.

(*b*) *The role of religion and philosophy*

Kosambi explains why religion deserves such special interest :

> The religions themselves do not constitute history, but their rise and change of function is excellent historical material. Indian society seemed to develop more by successive religious transformation than by violence, it failed to develop further for much the same reasons, even when considerable violence was superimposed later on.[86]

Religion could play such a role because old beliefs could survive along with the continuation of older modes of life. The abundance of nature made it possible in India for the stage of food-gathering to continue and co-exist with later stages for a much longer time than elsewhere. For the same reason less violence was necessary as compared with Europe or America. Instead, religion played a dominant role in the formation of society and its culture.[87]

Kosambi points to the crucial role of religion in the successive periods of Indian history. Trying to decipher the

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[86] Kosambi, p. 16.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

peculiarities of the Indus culture in comparison with similar civilisations in Egypt and Mesopotamia, he identifies religion as the essential ideological force of the Indus society. The absence of palaces and monuments in Mohenjo-daro and Harappa excludes the dynastic rule of divine warlords, as in Egypt, as a dominant pattern. The lack of innovation among the merchants in spite of their wealth and international communications leads to the conclusion that ' the land as a whole must have been the property of and directly administered by the great temple and its priesthood. Once established, they would insist, in the way of most ancient priesthoods, upon preventing all innovation.' Kosambi sees this pattern repeat itself :

> The historical pattern was for peaceful religious stagnation to alternate with violent periods of war, invasion, conquest or anarchy.[88]

He pays special attention to the role of Buddhism during the 1500 years of its rise, spread and decline in India, accompanying the change from semi-pastoral tribal life to the first absolute monarchies and then to Feudalism.[89] The rise of Buddhism and contemporary new sects in the eastern Gangetic basin is understood as a response to new social and economic needs which could not be satisfied by the older doctrines. New propertied classes of free farmers and traders had emerged who were no longer bound by tribal regulations and who were based upon private property in farm animals, in land and its produce. They needed peace, safe trade routes, lower taxes and an end to the requisition of cattle for the yajna-sacrifices which used to precede warfare. It is a common characteristic of all the new sects of the sixth century that they denied the validity of any ritual, especially

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[88] *Ibid.*, p. 69f.
[89] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

of Vedic sacrifice. The reform was so complete that it led to the still valid Hindu taboo upon cattle-killing which meanwhile lost its economic rationale.[90]

An attractive aspect of Buddhism was that it offered a ' Middle way ' between the unrestrained individualistic self-indulgence of the materialist doctrines which had emerged at about the same time and were ideologically used for the justification of the brutal practice of the Magadhan statecraft, on the one hand, and the equally individualistic but preposterous ascetic punishment of the body, on the other hand.[91] Buddhism produced a new type of religious literature, ' addressed to the whole of contemporary society, not reserved for a few learned initiates and adepts '. It works out ' the duties of a householder and peasant regardless of caste, wealth, profession and with no attention whatever to ritual '. It even propounds new duties for the absolute monarch : collecting taxes and suppressing banditry and strife by force would not tackle the root of social evil, poverty and unemployment. Charity would not help either. The correct way to prosperity and peace would be to supply seed and food to the farmers, capital to the traders, proper payment to the servants of the State, and public works for the benefit of all. Naturally, Kosambi is highly positive about this approach giving man control over himself, and achieving such modern views of political economy fitting to the needs of a rapidly evolving society.[92] He finds a negative contrast in the emerging worship of Krishna, the ' dark hero of the Indus ', which would outlast Buddhism in India. This worship, founded on myths, and inconsistently meaning ' all things to all men and everything

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[90] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[91] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[92] *Ibid.*, p. 113f.

to most women '—just as the superb inconsistency of the *Gita* allows the reader ' to justify almost any action while shrugging off the consequences '—, ' reflects the relationship between a highly composite society with a relatively primitive level of production and its religion '.[93] Krishna's marriages served the purpose of assimilating patriarchal Aryans to some matriarchal pre-Aryans. As a protector of cattle he accompanied the shift from pastoral to agrarian life, replacing Indra and the other *vedic* deities.

Buddhism played a special role in the Asokan reform which developed a new concept of State, solving the growing contradiction between the absolutistic bureaucratic State and the private traders and entrepreneurs. The Magadhan State was an undertaking of the bureaucracy for the bureaucracy. The new attitude towards the subjects and the new works along the trade routes, introduced by Asoka, served the purpose of reconciling classes and establishing a firm class basis for the State.

> King and citizen found common meeting-ground in freshly developed religion.
>
> *Dharma*, originally meaning ' equity ' under Asoka, soon came to mean ' religion ' in quite a different way.
>
> The most prominent feature of Indian cultural developments thereafter would always bear the misleading outer cover of some *dharma*.[94]

For the time being—a long period of many centuries—Buddhism spread along with the merchants, its monasteries providing them with capital and pleasant shelter, which in its turn caused the loss of the austerity which characterised early Buddhism. For a long time this did not clash with the

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[93] *Ibid.*, p. 114f.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

brahmins who could not provide the services which were offered by the Buddhist monasteries and who were not hampered by them, on the other hand. But the Brahmin caste assumed a new role, which has been described already.

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya comments on Kosambi's theory in his impressive book, *Lokāyata: A Study in Ancient Materialism*.[95] He agrees that the 'advance of the agrarian village economy over tribal country is the first great social revolution in India.' But he suggests that Kosambi gives a rather one-sided picture of this social transformation by emphasising the role of religion as replacing violence in the process. Chattopadhyaya does not deny the role of religion but he refers to the writings of Kautilya as an indication of the preceding violent conquest of the tribes, as in Asoka's Kalinga war, while the brahmin immigrants played a preparatory role as infiltrators and spies. The process of absorption as described by Kosambi followed only afterwards.[96]

This argument of Chattopadhyaya with Kosambi is only one small section of his 700 page book in which he attempts an interpretation of ancient Indian philosophy from the Marxist, materialistic point of view, concentrating on the *Lokāyata* in the ancient texts. Qualifiying this archaic world outlook as essentially pre-spiritualistic 'primitive proto-materialism' he sees it as the starting point of a materialistic philosophical tradition, which refutes the claim that Indian philosophy basically belongs to idealism and its famous spirituality. Part of his materialistic interpretation is the attempt to understand the social background of *Lokāyata*. First, he identifies the primitive rituals which are the original

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[95] PPH, 1959; 1973, Third Edition
[96] *Ibid.*, p. 185f.

essence of *Lokāyata* as a form of *Tantrism* belonging to primitive tribal society. But *Tantrism* occurs not only in ancient but also in medieval and even in modern India, because tribal society itself has survived so long. India's social history can be characterised by the uneven development which allowed such survival and which is responsible for what Chattopadhyaya calls 'incomplete de-tribalisation', a phenomenon which he also traces in the ethnic composition, in the village communities, in the caste organisation and in the customary laws. The question arises how *Trantrism* with its primitive rituals could have such a substratum of proto-materialism. This is explained by its relation to agriculture which enables an instinctive acceptance of the primacy of the material human body and the material earth on which it lives. It is interesting that Chattopadhyaya finds reinforcement of his argument in Needham's 'Science and Civilisation in China', who suggests a close similarity between Chinese Taoism and Indian Tantrism. Both are basically magic, but as such they are at the basis of the development of science. Chattopadhyaya's book cannot be discussed in detail. His intentions and motivations for studying ancient Indian philosophy are clearly expressed in a more popular publication.[97]

'This book is based on the awareness that the Indian struggle for Socialism today is related to the struggle for the Indian philosophical heritage. Two main tasks are involved in the latter. First, an objective analysis of the actual philosophical materials of India in order to see what is living and what is dead in these. Secondly to nourish what is living and scrap what is dead. By nourishing what is living is meant the extension of its *potential* to the right direction and to see where it ultimately leads to, i.e., as enriched by the scientific materials historically accumulated later. I am myself convinced that this task rightly carried

[97] *Indian Atheism : A Marxist analysis*, Calcutta, 1969.

out leads to the fundamentals of Marxism, though this must not be vulgarised to mean the discovery of Marxism in traditional Indian philosophy. If the word discovery is at all permissible in this connection, it simply means the discovery of certain *directions* in Indian philosophy which rightly followed, leads the Indian today to Marxism.[98]

Whether this will happen or not, the time has gone where the Marxists were nowhere in the field of ancient Indian philosophy, leaving it uncontested to the spiritualists to claim the whole of it for their particular outlook and to feed the suspicion that a real Indian cannot be a Marxist and that a true Marxist must give up his Indian heritage.

(c) *From Asiatic mode to Colonial mode of production*

In spite of the contributions mentioned before the concept of Asiatic mode of production does not receive much attention in the present discussion. The focus seems to have shifted from pre-British India to India under colonial rule. A real understanding of the conditions created at that time promises to provide keys to the analysis of present Indian society. Can it be understood properly in the terms of Feudal, semi-Feudal, Capitalistic? Why is it that a fully-fledged Capitalism has so many difficulties to develop? What are the obstacles? Are they, may be, such that even after independence the Capitalist development cannot be but a thwarted one?

Discussing the impact of colonial rule certain differences with Marx's evaluation or rather his prognosis play a role once more. M. N. Roy showed already much more interest in the pecularities of colonised India rather than for those of pre-British India. He traced the causes of stagnation under

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[98] *Ibid*, Preface.

foreign rule to that rule itself, and contended that the lop-sided development of the last two centuries has to be ascribed to the specific mechanisms and structures of colonial rule.

Dutt follows the same line as he says that the British conquest brought not only the destruction of the village community but also of old manufacturing towns.

> In this way, India was forcibly transformed, from being a country of combined agriculture and manufactures, into an agricultural colony of British manufacturing Capitalism.[99]

Regarding the regenerating role of British rule he follows Marx by saying that it laid the material foundations of western society in Asia, mentioning the factors of political unity, native army, free press, private property, education, and means of communication. But he emphasizes—quoting Marx—that the destructive process was not accompanied by any corresponding growth of new forces.

The real stagnating impact of British rule, which Roy saw at work from the very beginning, is ascribed by Dutt to the later stage of modern Imperialism, which started operating after Marx's death. What was possible at an earlier stage is no longer possible under the new conditions created by modern Imperialism, namely 'to speak of the objectively revolutionising role of Capitalist rule in India. The role of modern Imperialism in India is fully and completely reactionary.' It is 'the main obstacle to advance of the productive forces, thwarting and retarding their development by all the weapons of its financial and political domination'.[100]

Looking at the economic structure of pre-British India Desai—like Marx—identifies the self-sufficient village and the

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[99] *India Today*, p. 122.
[100] *Ibid.*, p. 194.

indispensable role of the State in providing irrigation-works and the like as the main obstacles for an indigenous development of Capitalism. But in his chapter on the British conquest of India he focuses more on the political factors such as the chaos and internecine war after the disintegration of the Moghul Empire that favoured the victory of the conquerors. Altogether it was the fact of a comparatively—not absolutely—stronger foreign bourgeoisie which decided the future course of development in India.

> Before the rising merchant class of India could develop sufficient economic and social strength to seize political power from the Feudal classes and use that power for Capitalist expansion, thereby transforming India from a Feudal to a Capitalist economic foundation, armed and economically more powerful foreign commercial corporations had already made India the arena of their struggle for economic and political domination.[101]

Representing a higher mode of production the British invaders had, as Marx put it, the double task of destruction and regeneration. But the colonial interests of the new rulers made the historical progress which otherwise could have been expected, a rather ambiguous and distorted one. The introduction of private property in land meant an ' agrarian revolution '. But the new revenue and trade-politics brought not only the welcome breakdown of the village community but also de-industrialisation and decline of agriculture, and in its course, growing poverty, the rise of a new feudal class of non-cultivating landowners, and the development of medieval forms of economic servitude.[102] Colonial rule changed the social relations in agriculture, but not the technical basis.

Thus, the introduction of new land relations in agriculture in the conditions of the subordinate colonial position of

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[101] Desai, p. 31.

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

> India, did not result in any modernization and mechanization of agriculture, nor did it bring, even for a period, prosperity to the mass of the agricultural population.[103]

The only gain was, that agriculture became a national problem. Similarly, no growth of indigenous modern industry accompanied the decline of town and village handicrafts. Desai observes the same phenomenon of lopsided development, caused by Colonialism, in all fields of social and economic life.

The picture which emerges combines elements of Marx and Roy, but seems to be more on the line of the latter. Like both of them Desai is a radical westernizer, as becomes most clear in his chapter on modern education. With Marx he recognises the absence of private property and the self-sufficient village structure as obstacles in pre-British India. On the other hand, Desai assumes, like Roy, that India had its own potential for development in its towns and industries. And in his tale of the factual results of British colonial policy he has not many affirmative points to make about the 'historical mission' of European intervention which he welcomed in the terms of Marx. In fact, he also anticipates to a certain extent, like Roy did before him, what at a later stage was called the 'colonial mode of production' as a peculiar formation of a distinctive character.

This theme plays an increasing role in the present debate. Bipen Chandra took it up in his presidential address at the 32nd Session of the Indian History Congress (Jabbalpur 1970), under the title 'Colonialism and Modernization'. Utsa Patnaik argues on the same line in her contributions to the debate on the character of Indian agriculture. Here also the question of method and model comes in again. She

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[103] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

wants the Marxist scientists to focus their attention much more on the specifics of the Indian situation rather than to describe it in terms of essentials which are the same under different conditions. She asks for a creative application of Marxism, distinguishing between the historical materialistic method and the model which Marx used as he analysed the development of European Capitalism. The latter is not applicable to the very specific if not unique features of the Indian experience implied in the colonial subjugation of a country with a pre-Capitalist mode of production by a Capitalist power. This did not lead to the unfettered development of the Capitalist mode of production as some Marxists assume.

> The Indian case illustrates clearly that the mere penetration of money and exchange into the pre-Capitalist structure and the consequent growth of commerce fails to dissolve pre-Capitalist forms of organisation. India was colonised by the leading Capitalist power of the time and integrated into the world Capitalist system: but in a manner which preserved, even intensified pre-Capitalist forms of economic organisation and exploitation on a more monetised basis, with a change in their legal form but little change in content.[104]

Jairus Banaji, who takes Utsa Patnaik's side in the debate, goes one step further. Whereas the latter speaks more in terms of specific transitional forms between Feudalism and Capitalism or of a 'unique transitional structure', he proposes to develop a theory of a Colonial mode of production as a distinct mode. Hitherto the Marxists were used to arguing in terms of Feudalism and Capitalism, solving the problem of phenomena which did not fit into either one by working with the model of co-existing modes of production. All of it is

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[104] 'Development of Capitalism in Agriculture' in *Social Scientist*, Sept. 1972, p. 23.

based on the European experience. But the distinct characteristics of the colonial situation, of stagnation under the impact of Capitalism, can only properly be brought out in a ' theory of colonialism '. U. Patnaik, B. Chandra and others in other countries have developed the beginnings of such a theory.[105]

Banaji sets out to develop such theory further, stressing that it would be useless to copy Marx and Lenin. He especially warns against following Lenin in the sense of assuming that the model he constructed out of his studies of the Russian situation would be applicable to the Indian situation. Both situations are not comparable. In order to explain the difference Banaji makes a distinction between the neo-colonial reproduction of Capitalism through loans and direct investments as it happened in Canada, Australia and Russia, leading to the speeding up of a Capitalist development in the countries concerned, on the one hand, and the Colonial mode of production, on the other hand. In the latter the export of capital plays a secondary role only. It is characterised by the blocking of productive forces, by a disadvantageous international specialisation, external presence of centres of Capitalist accumulation and direct political domination, which altogether produce an ' abortive transition to Capitalism '. Lenin's theory applies to the first pattern only. In this context it is not necessary to discuss the validity of Lenin's as well as Banaji's analytical model of Russia—after all there might be more similarity between Russia and India than these models allow to perceive—but the methodological point is valid. The Indian situation should be analysed on its own terms.

This approach met with severe opposition from orthodox

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[105] J. Banaji, ' For a Theory of Colonial Modes of Production' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Dec. 23, 1972.

Marxists like Paresh Chattopadhyay and N. Ram. True, they cannot deny that the development of Capitalism in India under colonial conditions was a thwarted one, but they refuse to acknowledge that this cannot be explained with the general concepts of Marx and Lenin regarding the development of Capitalism in Western Europe and Russia. P. Chattopadhyay expresses his ' incapacity to be creative in the application of Marxism to India, in as much as we axiomatically hold that only those who are integrally connected with the revolutionary movement of the working class and subject to its discipline can be creative in this sense.[106]

He works with the Hegelian-Marxian distinction of the essence of a social formation and the accidence of a historical environment, a fruitful distinction if it is used dialectically-creatively. Otherwise, if it gets applied mechanically, it may lead to results in which history after all—as non-essential—is missing, which, is, of course, contrary to all what Marxism is about. Chattopadhyay states :

> We hold that, colony or no colony, Lenin's formulation of the problem—including his definition of Capitalism—is valid both where Capitalism has developed through an integrated, total process and where it has developed, by implication, through a differentiated, partial process.[107]

N. Ram has similar fears about the consequences of U. Patnaik's creativity for the general validity of Marxism-Leninism. He writes :

> In fact, Utsa Patnaik, by claiming a high degree of specificity for India, comes perilously close to making out a case that the Indian experience is unique, needing a modification of the theoretical stand and viewpoint of Marx and Lenin

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[106] Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture : An Anti-Kritik in *EPW*, *Review of Agriculture*, Dec. 1972, pp. A185-A192, p. A185.
[107] *Ibid.*, p. A187.

> on, say, Capitalism in agriculture. In the process, her study of the specificity of the backward Indian experience leads to questioning, even challenging, the formulations of Marxist-Leninist theory.[108]

Meanwhile also, Ram acknowledges the distorted development under the impact of Colonialism, but he sees in Marx's utterances on India and the Asiatic mode of production a sufficient explanation of the phenomena involved.[109]

Indeed, this is a way, strangely enough not explored by Patnaik, to take into account the peculiarities of the Indian situation in accordance with Marx's concept. Following this way it could lead Ram to conclusions close to the concept of a Colonial mode of production. The question is, what happens to Capitalist development if it is introduced by a colonial power and superimposed on a society whose structure differs from European Feudalism which brought forth Capitalism ? Is it so far from Marx to look at the results of this amalgam in terms of a new formation, differing as well from Feudalism as from Capitalism, just as Marx tried to identify the specifics of Russia by talking about a ' semi-Asiatic ' system ?

This debate is not a merely academic one. In the background political questions are waiting. Several of the participants are concerned about the political consequences which may follow from the one or the other position. Ram shows understanding for U. Patnaik's rejection of the position on the one hand, which argues that the bourgeois-democratic revolution in India has been completed and that the pre-

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[108] N. Ram, ' Development of Capitalism in Agriculture ' in *Social Scientist*, Dec. 1972, No. 5, pp. 51-57.

[109] See his article ' Impact of Early Colonisation on Economy of South India ', in *Social Scientist* Nov. 1972, No. 4, pp. 47-65.

Capitalist relations of production have been wiped out already by the bourgeoisie, and for her rejection, on the other hand, of the Trotskyite understanding ' that everything . . . is one reactionary mass of Capitalist relations '. So far she fits well into Ram's C.P.I. (M) position. But he is afraid that her arbitrary criteria which should show that what appears to be capitalistic is not really so, could bring her close to the theory of the ' non-Capitalist path of development ' for India, which is propagated by the CPI, though he notes that she nowhere subjectively implies this conclusion.[110] Chattopadhyay accuses Patnaik of putting ' these countries back to the proper set to which they belong—" non-Capitalist "—qualifying, presumably, for non-Socialist revolution (if at all).' [111]

U. Patnaik did not answer these questions about the political conclusions she draws from her theoretical position. They are not automatically given, it seems. Ranjit Sau makes this clear by a reference to the theoretical discussion regarding the character of agriculture in Latin America, where those who assume feudal characteristics (Debray a.o.) and, those who assume capitalist features (A. G. Frank), nevertheless agree that the fullest economic development of Latin America does not lie through further development of Capitalism.[112]

Further discussions on the situation in India may contribute—one would wish—to a similar converging of political positions in spite of different theoretical readings of the degree of Capitalist development. The two-stages scheme of

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[110] See Ram, *Social Scientist*, Dec. 1972.

[111] Anti-Kritik, EPW 30-12-1972, A188; *cf.* also for this discussion A. G. Frank 'On " Feudal " Modes, Models and Methods of Escaping Capitalist Reality', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6-1-1973.

[112] R. Sau, 'on the Essence and Manifestation of Capitalism in Indian Agriculture', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31-3-1973, A27-30.

bourgeois and Socialist revolution has been developed in view of the succession of Feudalism and Capitalism in Europe and was based on the assumption that each formation needs its full development and is capable of it as well. We have seen that almost all Indian Marxists agree that the development of Capitalism has been thwarted. Further research and discussion is needed to find out, whether the obstacles to a full-fledged Capitalist development are inherent to a formation which resulted from the mixture of pre-Capitalist and Colonial structures, or whether they have been removed since independence or can be done away with. The eventual conclusion that there is no point in completing the Capitalist development first, does not necessarily imply the option for one of the present political positions, either that of the Trotskyites or that of the non-Capitalist—or rather state-Capitalist—transition (from above). It may mean that a Socialist revolution has become the only way out, not only for the urban and rural proletariat, but for those huge non-proletarian sections of the urban and rural population as well who cannot expect any improvement of their situation within the present system. Once more, Marx' reflections on another way for Russia could encourage the search for such an own path for India as well, though the conditions are, of course, different.

CHAPTER III

INDIAN MARXISTS BETWEEN MARX AND GANDHI, MOSCOW AND MAO

1. The ambiguity of Gandhi

The complexities and ambiguities of Indian reality found their incarnation, as it were, in the person and work of Gandhi. Since his emergence as a leader of the national liberation movement in 1919 Marxists inside and outside the country tried to understand him and to assess his significance for the revolutionary movement. How difficult this was can be seen from the fact that they had to revise their judgment again and again. Predictions that his leadership because of his backward outlook would be short-lived proved wrong. Forecasts that he would betray the national movement were not fulfilled. Even the classification of Gandhi as a bourgeois leader needed clarification, as he kept his distance to the Congress government after Independence. It turned out that at least his personal aim was not simply ' power to the bourgeoisie '. It took some time before a balanced over-all evaluation of Gandhi was undertaken. Looking back Marxist writers nowadays admit the deficiencies of former approaches to Gandhi and tend to see this in relation to the shortcomings in understanding the peculiarities of Indian society and culture as a whole.

In his historical survey of the Communist attitudes towards Gandhi, S. G. Sardesai states that the CPI ' could never grasp Gandhi and Gandhism in their totality ' and he explains this failure as a lack of understanding some of those specific Indian problems like Hindu-Muslim unity, untouchability,

language problem and women's participation 'And so on and on I can refer to innumerable socio-economic and cultural problems of the most complicated social organism in the world, i.e.—Mother India, which Gandhi took up in all earnestness.' If he did not solve the problems, he at least was sensitive to them.

> With all his medieval social theories which, in the contemporary context, were theories of class collaboration, Gandhi knew and understood India better than we did in many vital respects.[1]

> His religious, social, ethical and philosophical ideas were antiquated, an expression of the backwardness of India. But, as such, they were also the expression of 'the yearnings and aspirations of tens of millions of the Indian people awakened to new life and struggle'.[2]

In the Marxist assessment of Gandhi various aspects can be distinguished : (*a*) his reactionary religious-philosophical outlook and the socio-political concepts connected with it ; (*b*) his progressive role as the leader of the anti-imperialist struggle for independence who succeeded in mobilizing the masses ; (*c*) the opponent of class-struggle who secured the supremacy of the Indian bourgeoisie ; (*d*) the saintly leader who by his identification with the masses gave the moral motivation for their mobilization.

(*a*) *The reactionary revivalist* : All Marxists agree that Gandhi's religious views and his social philosophy are reactionary in their essence, whatever his intentions and whatever his merits in other respects. They are so because of their

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[1] 'Gandhi and the CPI' in : *The Mahatma : A Marxist Symposium*, ed. by M. B. Rao, PPH 1969, p. 50.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

unrealistic orientation towards the past and because of their political function in serving the interests of the bourgeoisie by misleading the masses. Referring to his dispute with Lenin in 1920 M. N. Roy writes in his Memoirs :

> The role of Gandhi was the crucial point of difference. Lenin believed that as the inspirer and leader of a mass movement, he was a revolutionary. I maintained that as a religious and cultural revivalist, he was bound to be a reactionary socially, however revolutionary he might appear politically.[3]

Roy had a horror for the abstruse ideas of Gandhi, his rejection of the 'satanic' civilization of the modern world, his irrational religious motivation, and the very mixture of religion and politics. As a Marxist he was a rationalist, a man of reason and revolution, who propagated philosophical and political Enlightenment through radical westernization. As such he maintains his criticism after breaking with communism. As a leader of the Radical Democratic Party he says in 1946 :

> Thus on all these matters, which are integral to Gandhism, we differ from it. We do not share its puritanical morality ; we do not strive to deny the world the benefits of technology or of knowledge ; we are not tied to capitalist or pre-capitalist social forms as Gandhism in its alternative versions appears to be. Gandhism is restrictive all round ; it wants to shut mankind in, to enclose it within national frontiers, to deprive it of all that makes life worth living, of knowledge, of art, of sport, of enjoyment of any kind . . . Gandhism is diseased at the core. It is the product of a pathological mentality, of guilt, fear, obsession and self-hatred. Our ideas are healthy and rational. In the end we must win.[4]

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[3] Quoted by Sardesai, *ibid.*, p. 17.

[4] From speech in Dec. 46, in : M. N. Roy, P. Spratt, eds, *Beyond Communism*, Calcutta, 1968², p. 28.

Instead of further quotations from various Marxists, contrasting Gandhi and Marx themselves can show the deep-rooted differences which separate Marxists from what was essential in Gandhi's outlook and approach.

What once looked to Marx and many of his followers to be a curse, the major cause of India's former stagnancy, which deserved destruction even by colonial conquest, was in Gandhi's eyes the most precious heritage of India which should be rescued from the impact of western civilisation.

Gandhi sees like Marx the self-sufficient village, founded on the unity of agriculture and manufacture and organised through panchayats and the caste-system, as the basic structure of traditional Indian society which was able to survive all empires and catastrophes till British Imperialism almost destroyed it. In contrast with Marx—at least with his writings on India in the fifties— Gandhi does not see the static village India of the past as a dead burden whose remnants should be removed as quickly as possible in order to open up all ways for a dynamic development of a modern India. On the contrary, he perceives in its quiet, tenacious unchangeability the power and the glory of India as it was.

> India remains immovable and that is her glory. It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilised, ignorant and stolid, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India, and she remains, steady. This is her beauty : it is the sheet-anchor of our hope.[5]

What should be changed—in the sense of restored—is village India of his own days, inhabited by starving millions

[5] 'Hind Swaraj', in *Selected Works*, IV, p. 149-50.

who lost their work and their sense of dignity. Proclaiming the struggle against poverty, illiteracy, dirt and disease in rural India with his constructive programme, Gandhiji points back to the past, to the sources which provided employment for so many centuries before the British came, to the charkha and to village industries. Revival of the remnants of those times, of dying skills and occupations, is his slogan.

In spite of the Imperialist context in which it was imposed, Marx welcomed the introduction of western civilisation as a dynamic element which would prepare for a better future. Gandhi rejects not only Imperialism but western civilisation with ' industrialism ' as its very core. Looking at the British textile industry and its exploitation of India he raises the question whether large-scale industrial production is possible at all without exploitation of other countries which have to provide the primary products and the market for the final products. This does not mean that Gandhi wanted a mere imitation of the economy and life in the past. He is not opposed to improvements by science and technology, provided that these improvements really serve the people, not hindering self-reliance or allowed to become the means of exploitation.

In this respect he modifies his position of *Hind Swaraj*, as he more or less reluctantly admits that modern technology cannot be done away with altogether. But his basic orientation is expressed in *Hind Swaraj* :

> In order to restore India to its pristine condition, we have to return to it. In our own civilisation there will naturally be progress, retrogression, reforms and reactions ; but one effort is required, and that is to drive out western civilization. All else will follow.[6]

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[6] *Selected Works* IV, p. 188.

Thus, his programme for rural reconstruction aims at several things at the same time. The spinning wheel is first of all a pragmatic-economic proposition, a way of providing employment to the millions in the villages whose idleness is seen as the root-cause of their poverty. Secondly, the organising efforts which are part of the constructive programme can be seen as the political attempt to build up nationwide grass-roots organisations. Thirdly, it is a fight against exploitation of the villages by the cities.

> Our cities are not India. India lives in her seven and a half lacs of villages, and the cities live upon the villages. They do not bring their wealth from other countries. The city people are brokers and commission agents for the big houses of Europe, America and Japan. The cities have co-operated with the latter in the bleeding process that has gone on for the past two hundred years.[7]

It is on moral grounds that Gandhi urges the city-dwellers to buy the products of the charkha. They should see themselves as exploiters and parasites who were living on the backs of the villagers and who are obliged to repay their debts by supporting the khadi-programme. But the most basic reason behind Gandhi's village-revival-plans lies still deeper. He is convinced that peace and non-violence are only feasible when and where life is reduced to simple structures. Swadeshi, self-reliance, the voluntary self-limitation to the use and service of the nearest surroundings, is seen as the twin sister of *ahimsa*, just as large-scale industries and huge urban conglomerations are bound to exercise and to produce violence.

> I am convinced that if India is to attain true freedom, and through India the world also, then, sooner or later, the fact must be recognized that people will have to live in

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[7] *Young India*, Oct. 13, 1921.

villages not in towns ; in huts, not in palaces. Crores of people will never be able to live at peace with each other in towns and palaces. They will then have no recourse but to both violence and untruth.[8]

Thus it is truth itself which finally demands the return to the villages and their simple life. And where truth is at stake history has to oblige. Gandhi rejects the concept of progressing history in which any return is impossible. History is not more than the record of wars and similar interruptions of what really matters, ' of the even working of the force of love or of the soul'. ' History, then, is a record of an interruption of the course of nature. '[9] Return to the simplicity and non-violence—or at least limited violence—of village life is in accordance with that course of nature and therefore possible. Gandhi's revolution is in peace with the course of nature also. It is a ' silent and sure revolution like the silent but sure and life-giving revolution of the Charkha'.[10] And to those who find such ideas nonsensical, he says : ' Well, India is a country of nonsense, ' referring to the fact that the people do what they believe religion demands from them.[11] But it is true for Europe as well. If the Europeans want to escape from the circle of violence and exploitation, they have to take to non-violence and to a juster distribution of the products of labour by adopting a limitation to their wants. This is possible if there is faith, it does not matter how long it takes. ' A few thousand years are but a speck in the vast time circle. Someone has to make a beginning with a faith that will not flinch.'[12]

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[8] Pyarelal, *M. Gandhi, the Last Phase*, Vol. II, p. 544.
[9] ' Hind Swaraj ', *Selected Works*, IV, p. 171.
[10] *Harijan*, 13-4-1940.
[11] Madras 1916, in : *Economic and Industrial life and Relations* Vol. II, ed. V. B. Kher, Ahmedabad, 1957, p. 74.
[12] *Young India*, 3-9-1925 in *ibid.*, p. 22.

The difference in values between Marx and Gandhi is clear from their differing views on the values of city-life and village-life. Marx measures with the criteria of historical energy and activity, of dynamic change and of man striving to be the sovereign of circumstances and nature. Urban centres are the places where man is most advanced in this sense. He proclaims the subjugation of the countryside by the towns as part of the process of liberation from the idiocy of rural life. Gandhi, on the contrary, considers the whole process of urbanisation and increasing rule of the cities as the ' progress of tragedy '.[13] Cities are exploitative, parasitic. The city-dwellers should become village-minded, instead of the reverse. The urban educated should go and settle in the villages and ' tune themselves to the reception of permanent values '.[14]

Behind all this is a different concept of man and culture. Marx welcomes man's emancipation from nature and from the community to which he is tied, and he is willing to accept the price which mankind has to pay for progress by going through the periods of class society and its exploitation in anticipation of the socialist future of a free association of individuals, mastering society, in a planned way and without exploitation on the basis of abounding productivity. Gandhi sees in the development of the productive forces which Marx considers to be essential for such a future, only a way of crippling man through specialization and atomisation. Man can develop his full potentials only in the small-size community without far-going specialization and based on personal relations. And he is sure that there will be scope for the development of all those skills which are at present monopolised by the cities.

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[13] Kher. *op. cit.*, II p. 183.
[14] *Harijan*, 20-2-37.

When our villages are fully developed there will be no dearth in them of men with a high degree of skill and artistic talent. There will be village poets, village artists, village architects, linguists and research workers. In short there will be nothing in life worth having which will not be had in the villages. Today the villages are dung heaps. Tomorrow they will be like tiny gardens of Eden where dwell highly intelligent folk whom no one can deceive or exploit.[15]

It is not difficult to detect the unrealistic assumptions of Gandhi. He does not raise the question, which is so crucial in the Marxist theory of culture, from which surplus this beautiful picture is going to be realised. There is no culture without production beyond the subsistence level. On the other hand, Marxists are faced with the question of how the free and full human development in Socialism is going to be realised on the basis and in the framework of a highly developed, specialised technical society. In both cases the problem of the State comes in as well, which plays such a role in the concept of the Asiatic mode of production but which seems to be absent from Gandhi's deliberations—the famous image of the oceanic circle of villages does not solve the problem—and which is very much present in the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Indian Marxists oriented themselves, of course, towards Marx. Given the contrasts in outlook, values and vision between him and Gandhi it is not surprising that they looked at Gandhi with deep suspicion of the direction in which he would take the nation. At the same time they were confronted with the paradoxical phenomenon that it was, of all people, this prophet of stagnancy, of return to the past, of non-violence and change of heart, who stirred the masses

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[15] *Harijan*, 10-11-46.

of India into unprecedented action, who set the dynamism of mass-action into motion as never before.

(*b*) *The progressive patriot.*—Lenin saw Gandhi as a revolutionary in spite of his reactionary ideas. He had fought against similar revivalists in Russia himself, but he had a broader revolutionary perspective than Roy. Lenin was no less a rationalist, a man of reason and revolution, and a westernizer, but he knew by experience more about the dark, irrational forces at work in history, not at least in the history of revolution. He knew about Gandhi's link with Tolstoy whom he admired in spite of his reactionary philosophy as a writer who gave insight into the conflicting forces at work in the soul of the Russian peasantry. He had met Father Gapon, the priest who led the workers of Moscow on a non-violent demonstration with a humble petition to the Tsar, a march which ended with the bloody massacre that triggered off the revolution of 1905. Gapon got, for awhile, radicalised by this experience and came to the revolutionaries in exile for weapons. He brought the breath of revolution, as Lenin felt it, into the sticky atmosphere of the revolutionaries who were fighting endless battles with ink about the true doctrine, the only saving strategy and tactics. Lenin had the confidence that reactionary ideologies would be blown away in the experience of revolutionary events. If Gandhi could mobilise the masses against British Imperialism, he was a revolutionary, whatever his ideas. As long as the masses would be on the move, these ideas could not do much damage.

Apart from this Lenin had political reasons to extend support to the national movement under Gandhi as its most powerful leader. He was, naturally, primarily interested in the relief which anti-Imperialist struggles could bring for

revolutionary Russia that was still besieged by the Imperialist powers. And beyond that he expected the world revolution in the course of the weakening of these powers which would be promoted by the liberation of their colonies. For the time being, who would lead the anti-Imperialist struggles in the colonies, was a secondary question for him. What mattered was that they would take place. Every ally in that struggle was welcome—for the time being—even Gandhi, or surely, also Gandhi. Lenin did not expect that the working class in the colonies could already play a leading role, small as it still was.

It was on the same line that the Comintern commented on Gandhi's leadership during the early twenties. He is given credit for involving the masses and for creating a consciousness of national solidarity among them. Also his methods of non-violence and non-cooperation, which were somewhat odd in Communist eyes, were appraised as practical and useful. Propagating non-violence he 'selected the only path open to Indian patriots under the present regime of oppression'. And 'Gandhi's call back to the spinning-wheel has a direct and practical aim', as it fosters local industry and spreads nationalist ideas among the people.[16] Even after Gandhi's calling off the mass movement in 1922 the emphasis in the comment of the Soviet spokesman is not only on the 'impasse' but as well on the achievements of the civil dis-obedience campaign in giving the national movement a mass character and uniting Moslems and Hindus.[17] Of course, the Comintern became more critical by that time. But the attitude towards Gandhi was still an open one in the Soviet Union, as the publication of Romain Rolland's bio-

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[16] From 1921, quoted in: Hemen Ray, *Indo-Soviet Relations* 1955-1971, Bombay, Jaico 1975, p. 239f.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 240.

graphy of Gandhi in 1924, the year of Lenin's death, indicates. Hemen Ray suggests that the climate definitely changed as Gandhi turned down an invitation to visit the Soviet Union. In any case, Stalin took a new line in his famous speech at the University of Peoples of the East in 1925, when he reckoned the Indian bourgeoisie under Gandhi's leadership as belonging to the ' conciliatory ' camp of the national bourgeoisie which had come to terms with British Imperialism as opposed to the revolutionary camp.[18] This approach would become dominant in the Comintern from the Sixth Congress in 1928. The policy of 1928 was revised in 1935. The material available to this author does not allow for an assessment of the changes in judgment about Gandhi's role in the anti-Imperialist struggle for the period between 1935 and 1955. A negative attitude seems to be dominating because of the damage which Gandhi's leadership did to the formation and broadening of an independent workers' movement.[19]

A few years after independence a clear shift in the judgment on Gandhi can be discerned. So far the Congress, naturally, had capitalized most on the memory of the Father of the Nation. Slowly, the Communists also joined the battle for the heritage of Gandhi in which the other parties indulged. The growing cleavage between the policies of the Congress and its Gandhian confessions, and Gandhi's own dissociation from a Congress organisation possessed by the greed for power, provided scope for a critical re-assessment in the national context. The studies of H. Mukerjee and E.M.S. Namboodiripad which will be discussed later can be considered as a result of this.

On the international level a new interpretation was due as well. After the death of Stalin the new Soviet leadership

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[18] *Cf.* Ray, p. 243.

[19] See below, c.

developed a new policy of friendship with countries like India which because of their neutral foreign policy came to be considered as belonging to the anti-Imperialist camp. In the context of this friendship policy a new assessment of Gandhi was propagated by Khrushchev and Bulganin during their 1955 visit to India. The Soviet orientalists were taken to task for their wrong one-sided comments in the past and they started delivering better ones. As could be expected, one of the themes that could show something in common was that of ' peaceful coexistence ' where much homage could be paid to Gandhi. The relation with Tolstoy was worked out, this time in a positive perspective. More important was the re-evaluation of the role of the national bourgeoisie. The policy of Stalin and of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern was criticised. Gandhi and the national bourgeoisie were rehabilitated : One of Hemen Ray's quotations sums up the new position :

> Basically Gandhi played a positive role in the development of a national liberation movement. It was precisely as a result of Gandhi's activity as a leader of the Indian National Congress that the organisation transformed into a mass party. Our unconditionally negative attitude toward Gandhi's non-violent tactics have been refuted by the facts. The National Congress, adopting these tactics under conditions of a general stirring of the anti-Imperialist movement, succeeded in inspiring very broad, and also backward masses for the struggle.[20]

The latest trend in the Soviet press, according to Ray, is an attempt to exploit Gandhi's ' Socialist ideas ' in order to foster the alliance of the working people with the progressive sections of the bourgeoisie, or, in other words, in order to undergird ideologically the CPI-policy of support for the ruling Congress party. Ray does not give much

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

material to illustrate this new tendency, but an article on 'Gandhi and Russia' written by the indologist E. Komarov and published in the *Deccan Herald* of the 2nd October 1973, does so. In it no trace of criticism is left. Gandhi is not only ' one of the greatest champions of peace ', but also a ' profound humanist ', whose views on education, untouchables, emancipation of women etc., ' though derived from the centuries-old ethos of Indian culture, had a progressive orientation'. He was not only inspired by Tolstoy, and praised by Gorky and Lenin, but his social outlook and ideology was also deeply influenced by these men and by the revolutionary experiences and experiments in Russia. Whatever favourable comments on Russia from Gandhi can be quoted are there, and nothing else. Everything reactionary has disappeared.

> In line with his understanding Gandhi strove for the social emancipation of the popular masses, and in this the Soviet example had a definite influence on him.

And that is why the Indian and the Soviet peoples have come closer to each other today.

(*c*) *The opponent of class struggle.*—In his conflict with Lenin, Roy was not so much concerned with the global struggle against Imperialism as much more with the prospects of the Indian workers movement in the long run. If the leadership of the national struggle would be with the national bourgeoisie, then the revolution most probably would be half-hearted and would go only to the point where the colonial bourgeoisie could strike a profitable bargain with the Imperialist bourgeoisie. The masses of workers and peasants would not benefit from any national movement unless they would play an active, independent or even dominant role in the struggle. Lenin himself had argued in a similar way during

the Russian revolution of 1905, but his claims of existing workers and peasants movements were more realistic than those of Roy. Of course, in all this the future role of the Communist revolutionaries themselves was at stake as well. Which revolutionary likes to concede the leading role to such allies who are going to be enemies in the long run? In the final chapter of *India in Transition*, the first Marxist analysis of Indian society, written in 1921 to convince the comrades in the Comintern of the correctness of his views, M. N. Roy reviews the ' present situation ' of the national movement as it developed under Gandhi's leadership since 1919. As a good Marxist he tries to analyse the conflicting forces in terms of class interests. The Moderates are representing the interests of the Capitalist bourgeoisie and of the rich intellectuals in liberal professions.[21] They prefer an arrangement with their stronger rivals, the British bourgeoisie, if they can secure some advantages, as it is the case with the reforms proposed by the British Government. They are moderate in political tactics but objectively ' revolutionary,' because of their modern Capitalist approach. The Extremists, on the other hand, are much more militant and intransigent in their political demands, but they are reactionary in their social outlook as they try to return to the past before western civilisation spoiled India. Their class base consists of the lower middle class which comprises according to Roy's more detailed description one year later, petty lawyers—back benches of the bar—small traders, students, teachers etc. They are economically bankrupt and do not have the perspective of improvement which the Capitalist bourgeoisie has. They are more ' susceptible to the influence of the forces of reaction masquerading in the garb of such cults as spiritual

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[21] One year later he includes also the landlords, see *Documents of the CPI.*, Vol.I, p. 489.

civilisation, humanitarianism etc'.[22] As Roy explains later, they have no real political programme, and are conservative because of their connection with the village. Through Gandhi they gain the leadership over the masses who are rising for social and economic reasons, but who are still unconscious about what they are really looking for. Gandhi succeeded in involving the masses. This brought also the progressive sections of the middle class into his camp, who would not be able to achieve anything without mass support. Roy identifies these sections later on as upper middle class which in respect to modern outlook belonged to the upper classes but which were excluded from the reforms, which made them politically more radical. But their extremism was of a different quality as it was a form of 'political radicalism actuated by modern ideals'.[23] Roy predicts their victory and the sort of homage this progressive middle class would pay, building 'a monument to the memory of the Mahatma for the valuable services he rendered them involuntarily' without ever sharing 'his pious indignation against western civilisation'.[24]

Both sections, the progressive and the reactionary one, have in common a deep aversion against any revolutionary uprising of the workers and peasant masses.

> The former is too timid, too limited in its outlook, in short, too bourgeois to court anything revolutionary; while the latter is decidedly anti-revolutionary, because it stands on a social foundation which will be made untenable by a revolution.[25]

They accept Gandhi's leadership because he was able to mobilise and to restrain the masses at the same time. Roy

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[22] *Transition*, p. 213.
[23] *Documents, op. cit.*, p. 490-1.
[24] *Transition*, p. 235.
[25] *Documents*, p. 491.

is convinced, in 1922, that both forms of extremism are spent forces, and that the only real revolutionary force which is left is that of the workers and peasants.[26] Some 'declassed intellectuals' who see the deficiencies of the old terrorist movement, like Roy himself, may join them.

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern, held in 1928, proclaimed that the national bourgeoisie had played out its role in the anti-Imperialist struggle. Lenin's policy was abandoned, that of Stalin and Roy became the new guideline (though Roy had changed his mind meanwhile, and was expelled in 1929). Roy had based his policy of non-cooperation with the national bourgeoisie on the theory of ' decolonization ', meaning that the Imperialist bourgeoisie had given up its obstruction of industrialisation in the colonies and instead had started to engender it and to strengthen the national bourgeoisie as its junior partner. The Comintern Congress rejected this theory in its basic document on ' The Revolutionary Movements in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies'. It reached, nevertheless, the same conclusion as Roy had done with regard to the national bourgeoisie in terms of practical policy. Its time was over. The turn was now of the working class in the colonies and Gandhism and the like had to be completely rejected.

> Tendencies like Gandhism in India thoroughly imbued with religious conceptions, idealize the most backward and economically reactionary forms of social life, see the solution of the social problems not in proletarian Socialism, but in a reversion to the backward form, preach passivity and repudiate the class struggle, and in the process of the development of the revolution became transformed into an openly reactionary force. Gandhism is more and more becoming an ideology directed against mass revolution. It must be strongly combated by Communism.[27]

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 494.
[27] Quoted in Ray, *Indo-Soviet Relations*, p. 243f.

Palme Dutt's references in *India Today* may serve as an example of the mood which Gandhi's ideology, his moralism and his on- and off-policies created among the Communist revolutionaries. He accuses him of thwarting the struggle by trying to reconcile the interests of the masses with the interests of the big bourgeoisie and the landlords. He gives several instances of Gandhi's reluctance to carry the battle to the finish. Thus, he appears as an instrument of the bourgeoisie:

> Whatever the views of the moderate leaders might be with regard to his personal idiosyncrasies, there was no question that he was the most subtle and experienced politician of the older group, with unrivalled mass prestige which world publicity had now enhanced as the greatest Indian figure; the ascetic defender of property in the name of the most religious and idealist principles of humility and love of poverty; the invincible metaphysical-theological casuist who could justify and reconcile anything and everything in an astounding tangle of explanations and arguments . . .; the prophet who by his personal saintliness and selflessness could unlock the door to the hearts of the masses where the moderate bourgeois leaders could not hope for a hearing—and the best guarantee of the shipwreck of any mass movement which had the blessing of his association. This Jonah of revolution, this general of unbroken disasters was the mascot of the bourgeoisie in each wave of the developing Indian struggle.[28]

Gandhi's obstruction of class-struggle remains a basic element of Marxist critique throughout. This is also true of Hiren Mukerjee's portrait of *Gandhiji* and E.M.S. Namboodiripad's study *The Mahatma and the Ism*, both published in 1958 by PPH. Both studies attempt to give a balanced picture and judgment. The authors are neither affected by the usual hagiographic pathos of so much literature on

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[28] Calcutta 1970, p. 358f.; referring to Gandhi's return to politics in 1928.

Gandhi nor are they carried away by the bitter emotions of disappointment and frustration which were so often dominant during the struggles in Gandhi's days. In their criticism of Gandhi they follow up many of the points that were raised already by Roy and Dutt. They show in historical detail his reluctance to take up the demands of workers and peasants, his opposition to the weapon of strike and of non-payment of rent to the landlords, his restriction of the masses which he awakened, his tactics of mobilising pressure for a bargain instead of organising a fight to the finish. Mukerjee makes these tactics of calling off revolutionary mass movements responsible for the outburst of communal clashes which he sees happening as soon as Gandhi suppresses the rising revolutionary mood of the masses. Perhaps it is too simplistic to assume here an exclusive and direct causal connection, but the correlation between the decrease of revolutionary mass activity and the increase of communal violence in different periods is remarkable indeed. E.M.S. is especially interested to show, why Gandhi, in spite of his backward outlook which was not shared by the bourgeoisie, moderates and extremists alike, nevertheless, was accepted by both wings as the leader of the Congress. As others before him he attributes this to Gandhi's ability to arouse the masses while limiting the scope of their actions to the struggle against British Imperialism without affecting the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie. It cannot be denied that Gandhi played such a role and that this must have been the main reason for the Congress to accept his leadership.

(*d*) *The Saint of the Masses.*—Both authors just mentioned are not satisfied with re-stating only this crucial aspect of Gandhi's political role, even if it is considered to be the dominant aspect, as it is by E.M.S. in his book. Both try to evaluate Gandhi's life as a whole and find elements which

transcend the class-character of his political work. Mukerjee sees in him the embodiment of ' the soul of our land ', as contradictory in himself as India also has been.[29] He sees his strength in a combination of mysticism with a vivid practical sense, ' the most formidable of all combinations.'[30] He wants people to learn from Gandhi's life as a whole rather than from his particular ideas, which were contradictory and even reactionary in many respects, and rather than from his political outlook which was basically a conservative one. Marxists should pay more attention to the qualities which he realised in a life of identification with the people, of service and sacrifice, of simplicity, quest for truth and gentleness. He sees the greatest contribution of all in his quality of fearlessness rather than in the notion of *ahimsa*. By teaching fearlessness he roused the dormant spirit and restored the Indian self-esteem. Emphasising these qualities of Gandhi, Mukerjee also recognises that Gandhi's concern with the means of struggle, their humanisation, is relevant for the left also, though it cannot accept non-violence.

E.M.S. has a more political approach throughout his book. In the historical part he depicts Gandhi mainly as a shrewd politician, analyses his actions in terms of strategy and tactics of the bourgeoisie, showing how Gandhi was able to adapt his principles to changing situations. His esteem for Gandhi is especially expressed in the final chapters on the transfer of power in 1947 and Gandhi's reaction towards it, and in his summing up on the ' meaning of Gandhism '. Gandhi's concern with the instability of the new created State shows him as the ideological and political leader of the Indian bourgeoisie, who has no personal interests in power but who

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[29] *Gandhiji*, pp. 2, 188.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

cares about the ' long-range interests of his class as a whole '.[31] That was his greatness as a statesman, so to say. But he was more than that. E.M.S. praises his honesty :

> It should be said to Gandhi's credit that he was perhaps the only leader of the Congress who ' frankly and fully ' admitted that the developments leading up to the transfer of power were indicative not of the triumph but of the defeat of the principles which he had been preaching during his whole lifetime.[32]

Gandhi admitted that his mission of regenerating Man had failed. Men had run mad. E.M.S. comments :

> No better, no more convincing, verdict can be given of the triumph of Gandhism as the political strategy and tactics of the bourgeoisie in the struggle against the British but at the same time of the total failure of Gandhism as a new social philosophy, a new method to regenerate Man.[33]

With this E.M.S. still remains within the boundaries of a political assessment. Naturally, it is a welcome opportunity for Communists and other opponents of the Congress to focus on these last years of Gandhi's life, where he stood alone, adhering to his principles, neglected by the Congress which wanted power at any price. It is the crucial point in his biography where the Congress' claim to his heritage can be refuted.

But this leads necessarily also, to the recognition that Gandhi cannot be understood in terms of class-interests only. E.M.S. reaches this point in his chapter on the ' Meaning of Gandhism '. Here he characterises Gandhi as an idealist not only in the philosophical sense, ' but also in the sense that he kept before him certain ideals to which

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[31] *Mahatma and the Ism*, p. 111.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

he clung till the end of his life.[34] It was this idealism which ' played a big role in rousing the hitherto slumbering millions of the rural poor '. They responded to his semi-religious language, his simple life and the passion with which he fought for their demands.[35]

> They looked upon him as their saviour, as a new incarnation of God, out to deliver them from the miserable plight in which they are placed.[36]

Here E.M.S. hits upon the point that it were exactly Gandhi's ' " reactionary " views ' that ' enabled him to form a bridge between the mass of peasantry and the sophisticated representatives and leaders of the modern national-democratic movement'.[37] If Gandhi would have been so progressive as his critics wanted him to be, he could not have played the role of stirring the rural masses into action. Once more, it was the same idealism that made Gandhi indispensable for the bourgeoisie. By it he mobilised the masses and restrained them also with the ideas of trusteeship, non-violence and the like. But also, it was again his idealism which isolated him finally from the burgeoisie.

> It is when we examine this growing gulf between him and his colleagues in the last days of his life that we come to a really objective all-sided assessment of Gandhiji, the man and his mission. For, this growing gulf was the manifestation of the reality that Gandhiji's insistence on certain moral values had once been helpful to the bourgeoisie, but became, in the last days of his life, a hindrance to it.[38]

The observation that it was Gandhi's reactionary views

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[34] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

[35] In an earlier chapter E.M.S. had shown how Gandhi in his constructive work studied and raised all the questions of their misery. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 116. [37] *Ibid.*, p. 117. [38] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

that made him arouse the masses, points at a difficult dilemma for the left. Evelyn Roy once wished for a new ' class conscious Gandhi ' arising from the ranks of Indian labour or from the intellectual proletariat to give leadership in the struggle.[39] She was longing for Gandhi's mass-appeal and popularity but—of course—without the medium of religious language, obscure ideas and all-embracing approach. Was this possible? Can a *sannyasi* be class-conscious? His mass-appeal in regard to his leadership, partly rests upon his ability to eliminate caste-consciousness. Can this universal appeal be put at the service of class-struggle which after all aims at the abolishing of classes? Otherwise, do the masses, the rural masses at least, only respond to a leader who appeals to them in the language of religion and tradition? Should, therefore, the left be rooted ' in the very thick of India as Gandhi was ', as Mohit Sen says, who formulates the slogan, 'he who wins the battle over the *Gita* wins the battle for the future of the Indian mind'?[40] Can the left enter into such a battle without becoming opportunistic and without compromising in essential questions? Gandhi's religious outlook made him incline to a reformist course in the question of transforming society. Are there other options within the Indian religious tradition which allow for a revolutionary re-interpretation? In Buddhism and Christianity we have examples that under the impact of revolutionary conditions and under the inspiration of reformers sections of their followers opposed the stabilizing function of religion in support of the *status quo*, joined revolutionary movements or initiated them and re-interpreted their faith in a revolutionary perspective without giving up its essence but as it were rediscovering it. Is this possible in Hinduism also?

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[39] *Documents*, p. 425.

[40] *The Mahatma*, p. 72.

Or should one bet on the process of modernization and secularization as the forces which will turn away the mind of the masses from the past? But can the left simply be passive on the cultural front? Or does it mean that only a cultural revolution along with the work of political organization can do the job, avoiding the danger of an opportunistic, confusing and self-defeating uncritical affirmation of the cultural heritage on the one hand, and of an equally opportunistic and self-defeating silent neglect of the cultural dimension on the other?

2. The complexity of the Indian situation

(*a*) *The urban-rural dichotomy*.—There are many ways to describe the complexity of Indian society. Marxists are used to discussing it in terms of various modes of production, trying to identify the dominant one. For this final paragraph the urban-rural contrast is chosen as a starting-point for a few, very tentative reflections. It is the relative strength of both sectors which makes the economic, political and cultural transformation of India such a complicated process. Any approach which bases itself only on one of the two sectors is doomed to fail or to require intolerable sacrifices. This is true for economic development as well as for political and cultural emancipation. It is one of the basic goals of the Socialist movement to overcome the antagonism of town and country.

> It is the most crass expression of the subjection of the individual under the division of labour, under a definite activity forced upon him—a subjection which makes one man into a restricted town-animal, the other into a restricted country-animal and daily creates anew the conflict between their interests . . . The abolition of the antagonism

between town and country is one of the first conditions of communal life.[41]

Given the conflict of interests much depends on how the problem is tackled. Gandhi thought it possible to restructure India on the base of its villages, subjecting the cities to the needs and necessities of the countryside. Nehru and the modern planners of India visualized the transformation of the whole of Indian society through industrialization, modern science and technology. Both approaches failed to achieve their goals. The *Bhoodan* and *Gramdan* activities of the Sarvodaya movement did not bring the total revolution of which the Gandhians were dreaming. Neither did the Five-Year-Plans, in spite of many achievements, bring the anticipated transformation. Certainly, the whole of India has been affected by the drive for modernization, but to an uneven degree, which, in some aspects may even have widened the gap. In any case it has not succeeded in transforming and integrating society in such a way that all become a part of it as productive participants with a share in the fruits of its development. The majority of the people, those existing under or just above the poverty-line, are affected in several ways by modern India but they are not part of it in any meaningful sense. The modern-industrial sector has grown but it has not been able to absorb a significant percentage of the surplus-workers from the agricultural sector, who come to the cities but rather get absorbed in the lumpen-proletariat which lives a miserable life on the fringe of modern, urban-industrial India. On the other hand, science and technology have entered the rural-agricultural sector and have effected significant changes in certain areas. But its

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[41] Marx in *German Ideology*, quoted by Sulabha Brahme & Kumud Pore in ' Menace of Urban Concentration ' in : M. Kurian (Ed.) : *India—State and Society*, Orient Longmans, 1975, p. 173.

impact has been limited, however, to the better-off sections in those particular regions. Commerce may penetrate into the most remote villages, but again what does it mean for those who are living on subsistence level? The Government has tried to design schemes for rural development which would promote the process of integration. The best-known and most ambitious example is the Community Development programme, conceived as a plan for a peaceful revolution in the countryside, initiated from above. It has been admitted that it largely failed to reach the majority of the poorer sections. They are still outside the scope of the schemes for economic development and social welfare. In other words, urban-based modern development has taken place but it has not involved the whole of India, it has not mobilized the rural masses as once Gandhiji succeeded in doing. It remained the development of a part of India, thus accentuating the unevenness in Indian society. After the failure of the Community Development approach the technocrats launched the 'green revolution'. Tractors became the symbol of progress. This is true, of course, as far as the increase of production is concerned. But they do not offer a solution to the basic problems of the rural population such as unemployment. On the contrary, they are part of new problems which keep cropping up. Of late, they are joined by those other symbols of progress, the bulldozers, which have proved their efficiency in the removal of urban slums, the by-products of rural unemployment. Obviously, the whole trend nowadays is to tackle the tremendous problems by powerful technical means from above, from the urban centres of power.

On the other hand, there are the activists of different shades who try to mobilize the victims, the marginal people, those who have no share in modern India. They identify

with the marginalized masses and some of them dream of conquering power in the course of action. They may succeed in building up local or regional strongholds, but the centres of power remain out of sight. So far, the ruling party keeps the upper hand, because it wields not only the power at the centre with the support of the industrial bourgeoisie but it also has its roots in the other part of India. It has strong links with the rural upper classes, but also still commands widespread loyalty among the rural poor. The latter have not forgotten what the Congress of Gandhiji meant to them, especially in the struggle against social discrimination. They have experienced some changes however modest, and there are always some signs and gestures and a few sincere officials who keep the hope alive among many of them that the government will deliver the goods.

The Indian Communists, also, if taken together, have roots both in the urban and in the rural sector. But they are deeply divided about it, and so far they have not succeeded much in gaining strength through the connection of organised industrial labour and organised peasantry and their struggles. In this context they find themselves between Marx and the India of Gandhi, Mao and the India of the Soviet-inspired Five-Year-Plans. This is reflected in the twists and the splits of the history of the Communist party. Traditionally, their base is the industrial proletariat as the most advanced class with a consistent perspective. They are, therefore, in full sympathy with a process of rapid industrialization and modernization which would foster the growth of that class. On the other hand, the industrial proletariat is and remains a tiny force in numbers compared with the exploited masses on the whole and the rural masses in particular. As an advanced class it has to link up with other exploited classes as well. The character of this connection is crucial for the

future. To place the question in perspective it may be useful to look at the Russian and Chinese experience, though the Indian situation is, of course, another one. Those experiences can serve as illustrations of the problem not as models for its solution.

In Russia the peasantry also constituted the huge majority of the exploited masses. The Communist distrusted them as backward and unreliable. At the same time they welcomed them as temporary allies in the struggle against Tsarism and appealed to them (especially to the soldiers in the army of the Tsar) in the final battle for the conquest of power in the cities and during the civil war that followed. But neither ideologically nor organisationally did the peasantry become an integral part of the revolutionary movement, at least not within the cadre of the Bolshevik party. The further development of industrialization and collectivization and of the bureaucratic repression of the peasantry have been discussed earlier. During the Russian revolution the cities took command over the countryside, and the rural masses became objects as before, objects of planning and education, and also of exploitation and repression.

The Chinese revolution took on another development. Forced by the bloody repression by Chiang Kai-shek in 1927 some of the Communists left the cities and took to the countryside in order to survive, building up an armed resistance. It was in this context that an unprecedented fusion took place between the Communist movement under Mao's leadership and the rebellious peasantry. Out of this fusion a real agrarian revolution was born, which finally led to the transformation of the whole Chinese society. The process of fusion in which both were changed was characterized by an ongoing interaction between town and country. The Communist revolutionaries came from the cities and brought the ideo-

logical perspective, the forms of organisation and the leadership which enabled the peasantry to overcome the traditional limitations of its perennial rebellions. Instead of vague dreams of egalitarianism, primitive brotherhood, justice and good government new goals were implanted to guide the struggle, such as 'national salvation', struggle against Imperialism and for Socialism. Instead of spontaneous mass violence, riots, and rigid forms of organisation in secret societies new forms of organisation were introduced to give consistency to the struggle and to involve as many people as possible, such as the Red Army, guerilla and militia units, the Communist Party, the Poor Peasant's Union, and the Women's Associations.

> The essential ingredients of the modern Chinese revolution—ideas, men and structures—had been initially a product not of the countryside but of the industrial towns, though these new revolutionary forces had themselves only been transformed and adapted as a result of the defeat of the urban revolution in 1927. Implanted in the countryside from then onwards, they allowed the peasant movement to merge with the modern Chinese revolution and provided it with a mass base and a new vigour.[42]

The Chinese experience had of course, theoretical consequences. To infer that Mao had given up the idea of proletarian leadership and had become a peasant revolutionary would certainly be wrong altogether. The instances mentioned above reveal the decisive role of the proletarian elements introduced from outside ; it implied, however, the correction of the assumption that the revolution always has to be based on the most advanced areas and the most advanced sections of the people. In China the base of the revolution was in the most backward border areas and its principal social force

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[42] Jean Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts in China*, 1840-1949, London, 1973, p. 152.

was the quite backward peasantry. With outside help it turned into a decisive force. Contrary to the course of events in Russia the countryside finally surrounded the cities and conquered them. For a while it appeared as if the peasants would be discarded after the conquest of power. The cities became the centre of power ; centralized planning was introduced following the model of the Soviet Union ; it now looked as if the cities would subordinate the countryside. But after a few years Mao Tse-tung and others started to oppose such an urban-biased development. With the Great Leap Forward and the introduction of the People's Communes they took once more to the countryside, trying to avoid the alienation of the peasant masses from the process of Socialist construction and to keep and mobilize them again as an integral part of the revolutionary movement after the conquest of power also. They had contributed to the shaping of the Yenan-model which had become ' the image of a new society founded on new political and human relations, with a new culture and a new type of militant revolutionary '.[43] Although it was a military society it was also a democratic one ' in which the traditional opposition between the organs of power—military as well as civil—and more recently between members of the party and ordinary people was reduced to the minimum. The civil and military leaders shared the simple life of the peasants and soldiers . . . and bore no insignia of rank or power '.[44] The revolutionary militants from the towns were forced, in the Rectification Campaign of 1940-42 and again in the Cultural Revolution of 1966, to go to the school of the peasantry, to learn its language and to draw on its rich traditions and colourful imagery. In the process a new popular culture emerged,

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[43] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

fed by peasant tradition which was at the same time integrated with the revolutionary struggle. Thus the interaction between town and country has continued in People's China. This is the secret of its basic achievements and is at the core of its ongoing political struggles.

All this should not be misunderstood as an attempt to romanticize the peasantry. The peasants have to be taken seriously, whatever their limitations, because of their sheer masses. Their limitations and potential have both been revealed by the history of China. Communist historians in China have invested great energy in re-writing China's history in the light of its peasants uprisings. It can be suggested that the 'Asiatic' despotic state with its exploitation of the peasantry instead of being responsible for the lethargy of the people in the villages has contributed to a tradition of peasant revolts. Far from being apathetic and fatalistic they rose again and again throughout Chinese history, against their direct exploiters and against the State, following slogans like 'When the officials oppress, let the people revolt!' and 'Attack the rich and help the poor'.[45] They even succeeded in overthrowing dynasties, but because of their spontaneous and sporadic local character and lack of revolutionary consistency they never succeeded in replacing the old order by a new one. They were merely rebellions, not revolutions.

The traditional limitations of the peasantry are well described in William Hinton's classical study of the Chinese revolution *Fanshen*.[46] He speaks of the individualism and lack of vision arising out of small-scale production. 'Completely absorbed in crop production, family life, and the desperate battle for daily survival, they were true victims of the "idiocy of village

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[45] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[46] *Penguin*.

life"'.[47] He also mentions their weakness regarding sustained long term action for the transformation of society. 'The despair of men standing up to their necks in water coupled with the ignorance engendered by a "well-bottom" view of social relations led inevitably to impetuosity in action.'[48] But he also describes how the Communist cadres in a painful process of identification, criticism and self-criticism, themselves being as much educated as educating others, were able to remould the peasants into participants of the historical process. The lesson that China teaches is that the peasants are not condemned by their limitations to be discarded by the process, to be victimised, or to be made passive objects of planning, education and welfare.

Indian Communists have made similar experiences in a different political, socio-economic and cultural context. Sometimes they may be desperate about the apathy and fatalism which seem to rule the countryside. Especially when crucial struggles take place in industry and in the cities, they may complain about the passivity of the villages, like Marx blamed the indifference of the isolated villagers. On the other hand, the Indian countryside also has been and is the scene of vigorous mass-actions which belie the assumption that the rural masses are necessarily dormant and docile. It has been discussed already how Gandhi was able to mobilize the rural masses. But there were many other struggles also and Indian Communists have played a leading role in some of them.

Kathleen Gough has studied a number of 77 armed revolts during the last two centuries which took place in all the major regions of India.[49] Her study is of interest with regard

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[47] *Ibid.*, p. 64. [48] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[49] See 'Indian Peasant Uprisings', in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, 1974, pp. 1391ff.

to the Marxist debate about Indian history, referred to earlier. These risings were directed against landlords and moneylenders, and against revenue agents and other bureaucrats, police and military forces. They were regionally limited but some of them involved several lakhs of peasants. In our context the recent peasant uprisings under Communist guidance are of special interest. They are different from earlier peasant movements as they were led by a vanguard party coming from outside and ultimately aiming at establishing a People's Democracy as a prelude to the transition to Socialism throughout India. But there are also features common with previous movements. The traditional tactics of social banditry and of terrorist vengeance, used in Kerala 1948-49 and by the CPI (ML) in 1969-72 turned out to be less successful and actually harmful, it can be said—in contrast to the movements which were accompanied by mass insurrection and demands for redress of specific grievances and popular control by peasant committees, as it was the case in Tebhaga/ Bengal, Telengana and Thanjavur 1948. Gough suggests that there is also continuity with religious movements of the past.

It is true of course that Marxism differs from religious belief in its denial of the supernatural, and that the work of Marx and his successors points a way towards non-dogmatic, scientific analysis of social phenomena. As a political ideology, however, especially when translated into the language and concepts of peasants, Marxism has similarities to religious movements in that it purports to offer a complete explanation of society and especially of social evils, and in that parts of the explanation are accepted on faith. Marxist movements are also dedicated to a future state of ethical virtue, providing new relationships for a 'blessed community'. Finally, as in chiliastic religious movements, its followers are ideally willing to sacrifice their lives to bring this state about.[50]

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[50] Gough, *op. cit.*, p. 1396.

Finally it is a significant feature that in all uprisings a large component of tribal people was involved. It is obvious that the Indian situation is very different from the situation prevailing in China of the nineteen twenties and the nineteen thirties. The attempts to reproduce Yenan in India have necessarily failed. Given the economic and political structures of India it is inconceivable that a rural-based movement on its own strength would be able to conquer power in India. Gough mentions that even the more successful revolts of Tebhaga, Telengana and Thanjavur ' occurred under irregular conditions which are unlikely to be repeated '.[51] The crucial question seems to be—and that is the comparable point of interest in the Chinese experience—whether the Communist movement here can achieve a similar fusion on a broad scale, uniting the various exploited classes and forces by such ideological and organisational means which allow a process of permanent interaction. The distance between a skilled industrial worker in one of India's modern industries and an agricultural labourer in a remote village, not to speak of a tribal in the forest is vast, in spite of the fact that many workers have only recently migrated to the cities. Trade-unionism which limits itself to direct economic issues cannot bridge the gap and may contribute to the alienation of those who need each other as allies. Of course, on paper the workers and the peasants are firmly united. The question is whether this unity is rooted in concrete experiences of solidarity in action and durably strengthened through forms of organisation. It is not only a matter of linking up economic struggles by encouraging mutual support, or of providing for proper representation of the groups concerned in the various organisations. It is also a matter of social and cultural interaction between exploited and oppressed

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[51] *Ibid.*, p. 1406.

groups who in the set-up of present society are separated by huge barriers. A mechanistic misunderstanding of Marxism has sometimes led to the illusionary view that cultural problems can wait till the conquest of power is followed by the nationalization of the means of production. It is assumed that everything else will automatically follow. Caste-barriers will disappear. The discrimination of women will cease to exist. It is true that all these evils are connected with the present exploitative society. But it is also true that cultural traditions and patterns of behaviour are extremely tenacious and able to survive their original causes for centuries. Indian history is full of examples, as Kosambi has shown, how customs which were once introduced for economic reasons developed their own autonomy and imposed themselves even against economic reason. Moreover, caste-oppression and discrimination of women are part of the present power-structure. But would it not be somewhat idealistic for Marxists to assume that urban, high-caste and male party leaders will spontaneously share power—and that is the crucial point—with rural, low-caste and female comrades after the conquest of power if they did not do this before in the modest context of their organisations?

In the Russian model the 'cultural revolution' which took place after the political revolution became a matter of education in the traditional way of imparting skills and knowledge. Whatever the achievements, it has been a one-sided affair of 'uplifting' the villagers to the urban level, giving some of them access to urban careers and the like. This is in tune with the traditional unilinear concept of progress. A dialectical concept, however, would see the potential for interaction, mutual enrichment and correction between people representing different periods and aspects of human development. The city-dweller is with all his technological

and scientific advance a 'restricted town-animal' after all. He has not only to give but also to receive in the process of exchange. For instance reports from tribal movements often organized by Marxists indicate this. Town people may come bringing initiative, leadership, ideological orientation, widening of political horizon etc., but they also discover long-forgotten patterns of equality, and a strong sense of solidarity which is far superior to the divisiveness of higher-developed caste society. Women organizers who suffer under male chauvinism even within leftist organizations are impressed with the equality which tribal women enjoy, and tribal women open new ways for women's emancipation. Tribals may even be the only group which could give a revolutionary re-interpretation of Hindu religion, as some reports indicate. Of course, all this is not a matter of romantic return to the simplicity of tribal life, but it is a question of looking back into the very early beginnings of Indian history and culture, measuring not only the advances made in history but also the deficiencies of the historical development, and recovering some of the values which can be developed into a new direction and which can be integrated on a new level. This would be one way maybe of meeting the problems caused by the process which has been called the incomplete de-tribalisation—somewhat comparable to the revolutionary return proclaimed by Lenin in *State and Revolution* to a form of primitive democracy on a higher level, using the 'regenerative force' of the village commune as envisaged by Marx in his writings about Russia. In its later history India has become a caste-ridden land of endless fissions. It is crucial for the future of the left whether it can become the focus for a process of fusion of the exploited classes and groups, creating a cultural revolution in which workers and peasants, Caste Hindus, Harijans and tribals are being united in the struggle for a new society which will also be responsive to their common cultural renewal.

(*b*) *The bureaucratic-technocratic connection.* — Whereas the tribals are on the fringe of Indian society the state-bureaucracy occupies a central and crucial place in it. Whatever the merits and limits of the concept of the Asiatic mode of production, the debate about it has focused attention on the extraordinary role of the state in certain societies. It would be worthwhile to study, in detail, the historical development of the state-apparatus in India, its continuities and discontinuities from the time of the Hindu kingdoms through the Mughal period and the British era until the time of post-independent India. Kosambi gives interesting observations about the changes in this respect in ancient India. Habib sees the principal contradiction in Mughal India between the bureaucracy and the peasantry. British colonial administrators admit to a certain continuity with the set-up of the Mughal-administration.[52] What is more important, Sir Percival claims that the British themselves have developed in India 'the most powerful and closely knit bureaucracy in the world'. Whether this claim can be verified or not, there can be no doubt that it was a very strong apparatus and that much of it has survived in independent India. Embarking on planning and expanding the control of the State over important sectors of the economy the apparatus has been expanded. Many aspects have to be studied which cannot be done here. In this context we are particularly concerned with the historical perspective. What does the burden of a bureaucracy rooted in the past imply for a socialist future? The strength of bureaucracy derives partly from its actual function, partly from its traditional role. In a society which has a weak bureaucratic and strong democratic tradition, resistance to and checks upon a can-

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[52] *Cf.* Sir Percival Griffiths, *The British Impact on India*, London 1952.

cerous growth of bureaucratism can be expected to be more successful than in a society where a modern bureaucracy can build upon the foundations laid by a strong bureaucratic tradition. It is not only a question of actual power on the side of the government and the bureaucratic apparatus but even more that of the attitude of the ruled towards it. Experiencing the power of the government bureaucracy over a long period creates an attitude of dependence, of expecting the solution of any problem from above, of not knowing or not trusting one's own capability. Bureaucratism creates a climate of dependency and of helplessness which justifies its further growth. Under certain conditions it may bring all sorts of benefits, but that is no reason to overlook the damage it does to the political potential of the people at large. Political action starts limiting itself to pressurizing the government to bestow some goods on the people, thus confirming its power. In the process there is a danger growing that people only fight for a more benevolent bureaucracy instead for a different society in which they themselves share the power and decide upon the destiny of their society.

The problem of bureaucracy is closely connected with that of technocracy. Gandhiji was opposed to modern large-scale production because of its bureaucratic connections also which would affect the self-reliance of the people. He wanted, as far as possible, a return to the village communes without a despotic State expanding its power by providing for large-scale public works. No Marxist can follow Gandhi in his approach to technological progress.

The increase of man's productivity is seen as a basic condition for the realization of the Communist goal of a society in which each can receive according to his needs while contributing according to his ability. Under conditions of scarcity this will not be possible. In this respect there is a

basic difference with Gandhi's suspicion regarding modern technology and his ascetic strife for limiting human wants. Nevertheless, the matter is not as simple as it may look from basic positions. In practice, there is also a strong ascetic trend in Marxism as it demands discipline, sacrifice and selflessness in the protracted struggle for a new society. There is, moreover, a deep division among Marxists as to the proper relation of technological revolution and socialist transformation of society.

The way in which the Soviet Union went about its industrialization was by giving high priority to large-scale heavy industry, centralization of economic power and planning, and along with it, inevitably, to expansive bureaucratization. It succeeded in a short time in making Russia one of the big industrial powers. But the price paid was uneven development in the country and excluding the working masses to a large extent from taking an active part in political life, i.e. in shaping the form of future society. Their contribution was reduced to that of hard-working producers and quite ascetic consumers, whereas bureaucrats and technocrats replaced the workers as political subjects of the revolution which had turned into a revolution from above. In modern times all emphasis is laid upon pursuing the ' Scientific and Technological Revolution '. The official doctrine assumes that this automatically goes along with or even goes ahead of marching towards Communism. The optimistic axiom simply juxtaposes both : ' technological and social progress is incompatible with the system of exploitation of man by man '.[53] In spite of official optimism there is a growing awareness in Eastern Europe of the problems involved, which is reflected in some sociological studies and especially

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[53] From : *The Scientific and Technological Revolution* : *Social Effects and Prospects*, Moscow, 1972.

in literature. In the collection of articles just quoted Alexander Akhiezer gives a distinctive other note to the discussion in his contribution under the title 'The Scientific and Technological Revolution and Guidance of Social Development'. He hints at the danger of 'one-sidedness of educational, professional or departmental limitation' caused by specialization in an increasingly complex society. In more cautious wordings he raises the question of who is controlling the technocrats and bureaucrats and what is going to protect the decision-makers against one-sidedness. Socialism means the ability of society—of the whole of society—to control its own development. To achieve this all-round information and increasing participation of the masses is needed.

> Extension of the people's participation in management is of exceptional importance because it permanently minimises the very possibility of the common interests being replaced by the private interests and of one level of management becoming estranged from others or from society as a whole. Naturally all levels of management will always need experts, but daily control from below will prevent their activity from being professionally or departmentally limited. Extension of mass participation in management removes the objective basis for various bureaucratic and technocratic illusions, for regarding not society as a whole but only a certain part of it as the subject of social management.[54]

It is very significant that the author in this connection refers to Lenin's *State and Revolution* in which he sees the majority learning how to administer the State themselves, and quotes another saying of Lenin : 'Living, creative Socialism is the product of the masses themselves.' It is such a line of thinking which made Mao deviate from the official Soviet

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[54] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

course and pursue another path of building Socialist society. He is not opposed to modern technology, he is not an advocate of intermediate technology as such, nor a prophet of ' small is beautiful '. On the contrary, he is impatient at times and wants to make ' great leaps forward ' which includes quick economic growth and technological progress. But he wants to make these leaps in step with the masses and he is willing to rectify himself if he gets out of tune with them. The Chinese Communists decided not to imitate the Soviet model—after following it for several years—not because they are opposed to heavy industry and the like, but because they saw the excessive centralization and bureaucratization and its heavy burden on the rural masses—which is part of the Soviet model—as an obstacle to building Socialism with the masses and in the final analysis therefore also as an impediment to a thorough and integral modernization. They tried to achieve modernization without antagonizing the rural masses by providing scope for them to experience their own progress in the process and without maintaining an inflated bureaucracy at the cost of the masses by decentralizing the economy, by giving room for initiatives from below and by propagating and demanding self-reliance. The people's communes were created with this in mind. To what extent they have been successful may be a matter of debate. Their significance reaches beyond direct results as they focus attention on some basic problems of building Socialism. Has this to be a revolution from above, led by engineers, bureaucrats and secret police, subordinating the majority of the people to a process of transformation which they cannot influence let alone control ? Or is it possible to involve the masses, to create scope for their initiatives on different levels, for developing the spirit of self-reliance instead of the spirit of fear, apathy and servility created by an all-powerful technocratic-bureaucratic apparatus ?

Of course, the situation in India is different on all accounts. State-power is not controlled by Communists but by the industrial bourgeoisie and some other sections. Planning and development are geared to promoting Capitalism. In order to overcome backward conditions Communists have generally welcomed the emphasis on industrialization assuming that it would be the best motor for creating the conditions for the transition to Socialism. They have pressurised for strengthening the public sector in order to curb the power of Imperialist forces, of the industrial bourgeoisie and especially of the monopoly houses. At the same time they pressed for radical agrarian reforms. All this is clear under the given circumstances. But what is the further perspective? The CPI seems to aim at getting in the long run a share of control over the public sector and the expanded state-machinery and managing the transition to Socialism in a peaceful way with the help of the Soviet Union, which is supposed to play the role of 'proletarian *avant garde*' with regard to less-developed countries. This concept is characterised by a bureacratic-technocratic spirit. Change will come from above. At best it would lead to transforming bureaucratic Capitalism into a sort of bureaucratic State-capitalism. Would this not bring a new variant of the all-powerful state which provides the public works and much more, whereas the huge masses continue to be the objects of history, this time of planning, of education, of exhortation to work and to be disciplined? It would realize the fears of Gandhi, but also of those Socialists and Communists who connect Socialism with the emancipation of the masses and with the withering away of the State, however important the role of the State may be in the period of transition. Nobody has yet solved the problems involved. The first step is to be aware of them. The Chinese have identified the problem of the interlink between bureaucratism and technocracy. But their way

cannot be copied in India thirty years later at a different stage of national and international development. Indian Marxism has suffered enough from an outward orientation moulding the analysis of Indian society according to pre-fixed schemes and projecting strategies for repeating battles that took place elsewhere. It makes no sense to invoke ' orthodox Marxism ' or ' Marxism-Leninism ' in one or the other form. Marxism is a critical theory. The problem is to avoid the simplifications of easy schemes and models, to reach a comprehensive understanding of the Indian situation in its complexity on the one hand, and on the other hand to discover ways to involve the broadest masses in such a way that the future is not left to the bureaucrats and technocrats. What matters are people.

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